



THE STORY OF
PHILIP METHUEN

BY MRS J.H. NEEDELL



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“ It is not growing like a tree
In bulk, doth make man better be;
Or standing like an oak three hundred year,
To fall a log at last, dry, bald, and sere.
In small proportions we just beauties see,
And in short measures Life may perfect be.”

—BEN JONSON.

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BY

MRS J. H. NEEDELL

AUTHOR OF 'JULIAN KARSLAKE'S SECRET,'
'LUCIA, HUGH, AND ANOTHER'

IN THREE VOLUMES

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THE STORY OF PHILIP METHUEN.

CHAPTER I.

“ O Florence, with thy Tuscan fields and hills,
Thy famous Arno, fed with all the rills,
Thou brightest star of star-bright Italy.”

“ Born into life ! who lists
May what is false hold dear,
And for himself makes mists
Through which to see less clear ;
The world is what it is for all our dust and din.”

—M. ARNOLD.

THE scene is Florence, the month May, and the time some two hours after sunrise. Already the city is astir, and the country people are trooping in and will soon be setting forth their fragrant wares in the market-place. Eggs in pyramids, of every shade of colour, from pure white to softest brown and palest green ; curd-

cheeses, round and smooth, and stacked like cannon-balls, with little twigs of the still tender chestnut-trees, fresh picked in the dewy dawn, thrust into the interstices.

The time for ripe fruits is not come yet ; the gourds and pomegranates are hanging crude and colourless on their parent stems, and the neutral-tinted berries of the grape scarcely show beneath the full spring leafage of the vines. But colour is not wanting : tall arum lilies stand in stately ranks, while masses of gladioli, cyclamen, violets, and the bearded hyacinth are lying about in heaps, soon to be divided by swift fingers into posies, when they will overflow the market-place and be exposed upon the old grey basements of the city's palaces, to tempt the eye of the English and American stranger. Whilst the patient mules are being unladen, and the baskets unpacked, the voices of girls and women, with a sprinkling of men amongst them, rise clear and resonant in the delicious morning air ; if the joke be rough or the speech sharp, it comes softened and rounded in the mellow Tuscan *patois* ; and a glance at

their lithe forms and bold and vivid faces shows where Michel Angelo got his models and Savonarola his eager followers.

But let us leave the market, and ascending the left bank of the river towards the Uffizi, stand still for a moment and look around at perhaps the fairest sight under heaven. Domes and spires fill the smokeless air, which, of necessity, are of carven stone ; but where else is stone carved and shaped into leafage and loveliness so delicate and ethereal ? Look at the finely fretted parapet of Or San Michele, lifting its sharp outlines above the dim tortuous streets which enclose it ; while the huge church itself, square-set like a fortress, uprears its bulk against the clouds with a mountainous majesty which seems to make it more akin to nature than to the work of man. And then by a little change of position you will be able to catch a glimpse of the Campanile of Giotto, more than five centuries old, but looking to-day, as has been charmingly said, “as fair and fresh in its perfect grace as if angels had built it in the night just past.”

But detail and panegyric are out of place where every church exhibits or encloses the supreme efforts and triumphs of genius, to be only outdone by the treasures stored in the noble palaces themselves; and the whole is pitched in the midst of cypress-groves, olive-slopes, and gardens flooded with sunshine and alight with changeful colour, while the yellow Arno rolls through the fertile valley and the distant Apennines shut in the picture.

On the morning with which we have to do, a man has just pushed open the window of a room in one of the irregular picturesque houses on the Lung' Arno, and stepping out on the balcony which projects over the full-flowing stream below, leans heavily over the rail and gazes out at the scene before him. He is intimately acquainted with the city on which his eyes rest, so as to be able to fill in from memory every point where vision fails. He can even recall the harmonious tints and weather-stains of certain old frescoes on the wall in a far-away street, or some grotesque bas-relief on a crumbling lintel; he can see the

dusky interior of some forge or trader's stall, which he will never pass again, or that of some stately church where the vast roof tapers up to a shimmering point of light, and through the issue of the half-open doors the baked pavement of the piazza gleams white and dazzling outside. At this very moment colour and light, sunshine and warmth, steep the whole world beyond his window: the pulse of life seems almost audible to listening ears.

The senses of this man, Lewis Trevelyan, who was gazing and listening, were almost preternaturally acute, for protracted disease had worn to tenuity the carnal elements of his body, and wrought upon nerves and brain till the highest point of tension and exasperation had been reached. He was quite aware that almost to the last the sands in his hour-glass were run, and that probably he would never be able to repeat the effort which had enabled him to reach the outside balcony of his room. Even now his strength was so far failing him as to make it difficult for him to retain his grasp upon the parapet; and a pang of mixed fear and

humiliation had struck across his heart when he became aware of an opening door and footsteps in the room behind him, and the next moment a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and a strong arm caught and propped his staggering figure.

“ You here ! ” he gasped, looking up into the face bent anxiously over him — “ you here ! What can have drawn you forth from St Sulpice ? I never expected to see your face again.”

“ Wait a moment till you have recovered yourself a little, and I will explain.”

It would not have been difficult for Philip Methuen to have raised the sick man in his arms and carried him back to the couch he had quitted, but he refrained, from a quick perception that such an action would have hurt the pride of the other, and contented himself with helping his painfully slow and difficult progress back to his former place and position.

When he had arranged his pillows, and given him a few drops of wine from a bottle of Johannisberger which stood on a little table close at hand, he drew a chair to the sofa and sat down beside his friend.

He had brought in with him from the market a bunch of roses and a fragrant sheaf of lilies of the valley, which he had flung down in his haste to help Trevelyan, and a little rough terra-cotta pot full of ripe strawberries.

“I see—you have not forgotten”—said Trevelyan, who had rallied a little by this time; “but the child is not here. I have sent her back again to Fiesole; what could a dying man do with her?”

Then after a pause, during which the young man regarded him with grave compassionate eyes—“You came in the nick of time to save me from the death of a dog; had I dropped on those stones I should never have risen again. Conceive my lying there in the eye of the sun till old Assunta had come in to discuss my superfluous dinner, or perhaps Richetti himself, bent on repeating the plausible falsehoods to which my ears had at last grown deaf! At last! it has been a long process, Philip.”

Methuen’s face was clouded and distressed, but he seemed to find it hard to answer. The

other observed him with a keenness which weakness seemed scarcely to obscure, and smiled as if amused.

“Come,” he continued, “say what is in your heart if it will make it lighter. Repeat the old formulas—my friendship will stand the strain. I have found life a bad business—a hard struggle, with the certainty of being vanquished in the end. Is not that the gospel according to Schopenhauer, and which I have proved and practised? You believe in God and a future life—in His goodness and management of affairs. If there were one, I would thank Him that He has given me courage enough, in the thick of my miseries and disappointments, to reject consolations to which the whole universe gives the lie!”

He spoke eagerly, in spite of pain and breathlessness: his was a temperament which would never grow cold till the hand of death quenched its ardours. It seemed to Philip that he rather desired to believe what he asserted than believed it.

“Are we able to pronounce on the whole

universe?" he answered. "Is not doubt a shade better than despair?"

Again the kind cynical smile played round Trevelyan's pale lips.

"I know you have the courage of your opinions, Methuen, and only spare me controversy and exhortation out of pity for my condition. But the time is gone by for that. I never hoped to have the chance of talking about my affairs to you again, and must make the best of it. But first, what has happened? How comes it that that tawny poll of yours is not yet disfigured by the tonsure? If you had come back a full-blown priest, I am not sure I should have refused to make my confession, and received the sacred wafer at your hands. It would have done me no harm, and given you an innocent satisfaction."

"All that is postponed. I have consented, if not to give up my vocation, at least to consider about giving it up."

Trevelyan stared at him in blank astonishment.

"I thought nothing more could surprise me,

but this does. Come, Methuen, I see the matter goes hard with you, but there need be no hesitation in making confidences to a dying man. Has your faith got a shock ? No ; it was too inveterate for fact or reason to shake it. Has the Abbé de Sève made some requisition beyond even your fanaticism to meet, or the world-wise archbishop himself opposed your singular predilection for martyrdom amongst the unsavoury savages of the Corea ? Any way, it is a satisfaction I never bargained for. May I wish you joy ? ”

“ As you like ; only bear in mind I have received the hardest blow fate could well have dealt me—that the deliberate plan of my life is upset. Try and understand what it is to have been on the point of consecration to a work you believed the best on earth, and to find yourself suddenly pulled back and forced to face the other way—a way you dislike and contemn.”

“ Ah, I begin to see daylight ! Some stroke of good fortune has occurred to you, and your mother, like a sensible woman as she is, has put her veto on the priesthood.”

“ You are right in a way. My cousin is dead on the very eve of his wedding-day, and my uncle writes to urge—to command me to——” he hesitated.

“ To raise up seed unto your cousin ! Is it part of the compact to take the widowed bride, or will a free choice be allowed you ? In that case, I shall put in a claim for my little gipsy. Forgive me, Philip, but I shall go down to the grave better content that you are compelled to play a man’s part in life. Priests don’t count as men.”

Methuen smiled.

“ I should have supposed a disciple of Schopenhauer would have deplored the probability of adding to the unredeemed sum of human misery, but there is but one logical faith. At least you now understand how the case stands with me, and we can talk of other things. You are much weaker, Trevelyan, than I expected to find you. Tell me anything you wish that it is in my power to do. I start for England to-day to be in time for poor Mark’s funeral.”

“ Then you must come back,” was the eager

rejoinder. “ I have not a single friend in Florence, nor outside of it, for that matter. I look to you, Philip, to see me put under ground, with decency at least, and to wind up my affairs. There is about a couple of hundreds lying at the bank here to my credit, which will be enough for such meagre funeral rites as I desire, and for the few debts I leave behind. Should there be any surplus, well—that will be my daughter’s fortune ! ” He spoke with concentrated bitterness, and added—“ Advise me what I am to do with the pauper ! ”

“ You have positively no relations who would be her natural guardians ? ”

“ Yes. I have a sister married to a parson in Sir Giles Methuen’s own parish ; but they are poor, and she hates me. I am talking against my strength, but must explain—if I can. Mine was not a good youth, Philip, and my early follies helped to ruin her prospects. Her dowry was swallowed up in the payment of debts it would have been a shame to have left unpaid. *Noblesse oblige*, and we were an honourable family, though a very impoverished one.

Through this the man of her choice threw her over, and she has always visited his sins, as well as my own, on my head, in spite of my endeavour to convince her that it was a stroke of good luck that she found him out this side of matrimony. She says also that I broke my father's heart. She would turn my miserable little girl out of doors."

There was an awkward pause, then Trevelyan spoke again.

"I have thought of your mother, Philip. Ah, I see; that, too, is a forlorn-hope! Let it be as if I had not spoken. The little minx has the gift of alienating goodwill."

"It is not that," said the other quickly; "but my mother has no love for children. I often think she barely tolerates her son. But if your sister is married to the vicar of Skeffington, my task is easy. I will go to her before I see you again. I cannot believe that it will be difficult to arrange matters."

"That means, you will offer to pay her handsomely for the girl's board, lodging, and education; but I would not trust her even then.

Moreover, it strikes me you are reckoning without your host. I know your yearly income, my dear fellow,—what the mother disburses, pardon me, and on what the son subsists, charities inclusive. No doubt the old baronet will increase your allowance, now you are become heir-presumptive, but only on condition that you show yourself accommodating. It will not be wise or well for you to burden yourself with the charge of a young woman on first starting in life. You are now, remember, one of the laity."

"A young woman!" repeated Methuen, smiling.

"That is what it is her misfortune to become, unless we could both go under ground together, which would be the best solution of the difficulty. I would not own to any one but you how anxious I am about the girl's future, with her promise of beauty, her strong will and vehement temper." He sighed impatiently. "I wish she had never been born! How can I die in peace, leaving that miserable little waif afloat on life's current?"

Methuen got up and looked at his watch.

“It grieves me to say I must go, but a week hence we will talk this matter over again. You may rest assured that I will see your sister, and bring back good news to you.”

He held the frail hand of the sick man closely but gently grasped, and looked down at him with an expression of such compassionate sympathy as to bring the tears to his eyes.

“You must live till I come back,” he added, “by God’s grace or force of will. I will write to you at every chance till I stand here by your side again. *Addio, a riverderci!*”

As he went out Trevelyan turned his face to the wall and groaned.

“Never more!” he said to himself, “never more! I have looked my last upon the one face I care to see.”

CHAPTER II.

“ A life of nothings, nothing worth,
From that first nothing ere his birth
To that last nothing under earth ! ”

—*The Two Voices.*

IT was a late spring in England. Cutting east winds had prevailed through the whole of May, and at the end of the month there came a frost so severe as to nip to the core the well-expanded blossoms of the Dorset apple-orchards, and with them the hopes of a profitable harvest.

“ What could God A’mighty mean by sending such a cruel night of weather ? ” asked one honest farmer of another as they stood beneath the blackened branches ; and gardeners surveyed, with equal despair, the scorched and shrivelled appearance of their wall-fruit trees, which yesterday had been alive with promise.

The very woods seemed to suspend development; the oak and beech still showed their gaunt grey boughs but thinly clad with tender leafage; and the ebon buds of the ash were locked hard and close in the ungenial air. Here and there the wild cherry and crab gleamed white or pink against the dim and dusky pines; and the pale stars of the persistent primrose still covered the banks amongst the mossy roots of hazels, through which the ferns were thrusting their russet scrolls. But the tender blue of the forget-me-not, and the full amethyst of the hyacinth, delayed their blossoming, and the spotted cowslip refused to open in the hard and frost-bound meadows.

Methuen Place, the seat of one of the oldest families in the county, but at the same time of a family whose annals were unknown to fame, stood in a hollow facing the wide upland sweep of its magnificent park, and served as half-way house between the substantial borough of Crawford on the one side, and the county town of Trichester on the other. It was a low picturesque pile of massive grey

stone, bearing the weather-stains and minute moss-growths of generations upon its hoary front, and with the deep angles of its solid walls and the arch of its ponderous entrance-gates covered with the lustrous green of magnolias and myrtles.

But in the late afternoon of the day when Philip Methuen first saw it, its aspect was singularly forlorn and depressing. He had driven in a hack-fly from the station at Trichester, and was chilled to the bone by his long journey through the biting air, as well as by a sense of discomfiture at the seeming absence of all welcome or expectation of his coming.

In reply to his inquiry as to whether there were any servant or carriage waiting for him from Methuen Place, the station-master had answered in the negative, with a certain dry significance which somehow brought the colour into his cheek; and the man whose vehicle he had chosen, addressing the rubicund driver of the "Antelope" railway 'bus, just on the point of departure with its scanty freight, said, with

a wink of intense significance, as he took his seat on the box and picked up the reins—

“If the gen’elman knowed Sir Giles’s greys as well as you and I do, Bill, he might have saved hisself the trouble of asking the question.”

He was quite prepared under encouragement to have given Philip the most minute information respecting his uncle’s establishment, habits, and reputation, but that did not suit the young man’s mood or temper, although he was not able to defend himself from the damaging impression instinctively received. As they entered the park and approached the house, he perceived that every blind was down, giving a blank and dismal effect to the whole façade. The flower-beds were empty of flowers, the soil lying under heaps of garden compost, and the lawns, under the scorching east winds, looked brown and impoverished. Not a gleam of colour or suggestion of warmth, natural or human, met his eyes, nor did there seem any stir of life about the premises—not even the bark of a dog was to be heard. But then it was to be remem-

bered the house contained the dead heir and the dead hopes of its owner.

The driver had made his way up the broad shallow stone steps which led to the principal entrance, and had knocked heavily at the door, muttering, "It was allers desp'rate hard to rouse 'em."

He was going to repeat the summons, when Philip jumped out to stop him; the sound seemed like sacrilege on that gloomy portal.

"We will wait a minute," he said; "perhaps you don't know there is a death in the house?"

The man grinned. "Don't know that Mark Methuen is dead!" he answered; "all the county knows that well enough, and knows, too, that the old man and his son hated each other like poison. No one would ever have taken *him* for a gentleman, whichever way up you tried it. He was a rum un," he added, reflectively, "he was!"

At this moment the door was suddenly thrown open, and Philip stepped for the first time over the threshold of his ancestral home.

From a boy he had listened to the querulous

embittered complaints of his mother at her banishment from all share of the family distinction and privileges, and the shameful injustice accruing, not so much to younger sons as to younger sons' wives. Her conception of the glories of Methuen Place, and of her brother-in-law's social importance, were probably exaggerated ; but still this was the house where generation had succeeded generation, and where his own father had first drawn the breath of life.

Words would be inadequate to describe the strength of the yearning with which the boy, mocked and misunderstood by his surviving parent, had regarded his father's memory ; and the prospect of so soon seeing one so closely allied to him in blood as Sir Giles Methuen caused him a profound secret agitation.

There was something of this indicated in the tone in which he inquired after his uncle of the staid elderly woman who had advanced to meet him as he entered the house ; and it may have had the effect of causing some softening of expression on her part, combined as it was with that easy graciousness of accost which is all but

invariably wanting in the manners of young Englishmen to their inferiors, and a smile the sweetness of which would have redeemed the ugliest face, and was even the crowning charm of his.

“Sir Giles keeps his room strictly since—since what has happened,” she said; “but he gave orders, if you arrived before dark, that you were to be shown up-stairs to him at once. I will take you to your room, sir, and come back for you as soon as I have given him notice. I daresay you would much rather have dressed and dined first; but Sir Giles is not one to think much of these things, Mr Methuen.”

“Neither do I. I shall be quite ready when you come for me.”

He followed her up the broad shallow oak staircase—almost as black as ebony with age and friction, and the massy balustrade of which was carved at its junction and terminal points with elaborate grotesqueness—across a wide corridor, set with numerous windows on the one side, commanding a view of the park, and which were faced by doors on the other.

There was an effect of old-world decaying luxury in the worn carpet which covered the floor, the finely harmonised colours and fabric of which proclaimed the work of some Eastern loom—in the heavy tapestried draperies at the windows, and the old velvet-padded seats below. The family coat of arms, with the traditional badge of its rank, were emblazoned in the upper lights of each, and dim portraits of long deceased ancestors filled up the panels of the wall.

The bed-chamber into which he was shown was on the same scale of ancient, ponderous dignity. Bed, couches, and windows were hung or covered with superb old tapestry, and the black oak floor displayed the same costly though decaying covering as the corridor outside. There were carved chairs and presses in the apartment which a modern æsthetæ would have estimated at half a king's ransom; and the high mantel, curiously niched and carved, would incontinently have been removed by him to one of the reception-rooms of the house.

The woman, who had introduced herself to

Philip as Mrs Gibson, the housekeeper of the establishment, attended him up-stairs with a mixed air of solicitude and formality. On entering the room she indicated to him certain arrangements for his comfort, which seemed to prove her undisputed control over the household, and left him with a broad hint to be quick at his toilet, as "Sir Giles was wellnigh worn out with trouble, and never very patient at the best of times."

The young man's preparations were so rapid that he was standing waiting before the window which overlooked the principal gardens, observing the dreary effect of a pretty Italian fountain, the basin of which was dry and moss-grown, and the conch of the water-god a receptacle for drifting leaves, when the expected summons came, and a few moments more saw him ushered into his uncle's presence. The room was a small study, lined with books from floor to ceiling, but otherwise somewhat barely furnished. A huge easy-chair was placed near one of the windows with its back to the door, and the figure of the man sitting in it was so

frail and bowed as to be quite invisible to any one entering the room.

Mrs Gibson having opened the door and pronounced the name of the visitor, had instantly retreated, closing it carefully behind her.

Philip hesitated a moment, then he saw a thin white hand, with long supple fingers, grasp the table which stood close to the chair, and Sir Giles Methuen, raising himself with evident difficulty, faced round and confronted his nephew.

The figure was insignificant, as we have said, and the delicately featured face was prematurely worn and old; but the eyes which shone under the thick grey brows retained their fire and penetration, and there was nothing senile in the hard expression of the firm thin lips.

There was neither affection nor even benevolence in his scrutiny, it was simply an investigation; and after a few moments he sank back again into his chair with a sort of stifled groan, whether produced by bodily or mental distress seemed doubtful.

The young man, though certainly not en-

couraged to do so, came forward, and after his foreign fashion took his uncle's hand and put it to his lips.

"I am come," he said, "because you commanded me to come. You cannot be more grieved for the cause than I am."

Sir Giles shivered a little as if cold, and continued to gaze at him intently.

"There is not a line of your figure nor a feature of your face which recalls my brother," he said, "which is to your advantage unquestionably, for the Methuens were never a handsome race. No doubt you are like the woman he married." A sneer sat on his lips as he spoke. "I think I can trust my memory sufficiently to be sure upon the point; but your voice, Philip Methuen, would be enough to convince me of your identity. Say something else."

"Shall I say how sorry I am to find you so weak and ill?"

"Also so old and unprepossessing? Yet hardly that! When was the failure of the man in possession otherwise than welcome to the heir?"

Philip smiled. "That is only from the

lips outward; you do not really believe your brother's son is capable of such a feeling. Also you must be aware that I have planned my life on very different lines. I want nothing that you can give me. Even now I am come out of respect due to the head of my family, —more to listen to what your wishes are, than with the purpose of yielding to them. That will be a question for debate."

Sir Giles's keen glance quickened.

"'Pon my soul, nephew, you lose no time in taking the initiative! I think we will waive the discussion of your future till the natural heir, lying up-stairs, is buried. It would have been more seemly if you had begun by offering me your condolences, instead of assuring me of your obstinacy and independence. Have you lost sight of the fact that I am a father bereaved of his only son?'"

Philip looked at him. There was no suggestion of tenderness or pain in the expression of the eyes that met his, or in the sharp ring of the metallic voice. He felt ashamed for the man who seemed to repudiate the first instincts

of humanity, and a pang of pity for the dead, who, though cut off in the flower of his youth, left no regrets behind him.

“It is just because I have not lost sight of that,” he answered, “that I have no condolence to offer. I am afraid to touch a wound so deep and so recent.”

A dark reluctant flush came over the old man’s face.

“What can you know?” he said, in a dull, suppressed voice. “But I am prepared to tell you that your consideration is overstrained. It is true I have lost my only son, but it is not true that I am bereaved. I am shocked, shaken, thrown out of gear with the future, when I thought time and I had settled our accounts. But the feeling at bottom is this,—that an anxiety which has corroded my life is removed ; that I shall once more hold up my shamed head and look the world in the face ; that the burden of degradation and hopeless misery which was imposed by the man who is dead, has unexpectedly slipped off my shoulders. You are scandalised ?”

There was an intensity of restrained emotion in Sir Giles's look and speech which overcame the instinctive repulsion with which Philip listened to him.

"At least," he said, "it is an immunity dearly purchased, and while life lasted there was hope of amendment and pardon."

"There was none," interrupted Sir Giles, harshly—"none other than that thorns should bring forth grapes, or corruption incorruption. His has been no ordinary career of youthful profligacy—the mere wasting of his substance with harlots—but a thorough identification with the lowest and basest forms of ill-living. There was not one spark of generous fire in his blood; not one sound spot in his soul to redeem the general leprosy. I groaned daily under the fear that he would carry our name into the felon's dock; and I deliberately thank God that his power to inflict torment has been cut short. I slept last night better than I have slept since he was a child, incapable of doing wrong because incapable of free action."

Then, with a quick change of tone and glance, he added—

“It may be, nephew, that your virtue has the same security—a predestined priest is still under authority.”

“I have no reason to think myself different from other men. I am quite prepared to grant that my life has been so carefully guarded that no merit attaches to my obedience. More than that, the time can never come for me when I shall cease to think myself under authority.”

“So far good: to-morrow I shall put your docility to the test. Now go down-stairs and have some dinner; and I hope the necessity of dining alone won’t spoil your appetite. I have long ceased to play the host. For the rest, we will not meet again till to-morrow’s ceremony—it will be a very brief one. The church is only a stone’s-throw from the house, and the vault was opened for its prey days ago. The coffin will be borne by the servants of the house. A few friends will attend for decency’s sake. You and I, as nearest of kin, will be chief mourners, Philip.”

The young man inclined his head, then said, with some hesitation, “I do not know the English customs, but if it were possible for me to see my cousin, I should like to do so.”

“It is not possible,—the coffin was nailed down forty-eight hours after death. You know that he died in the hunting-field? by a sort of irony of fate, the only field where he ever distinguished himself. A sharp flint cut the sensitive hoof of his horse; the animal plunged suddenly and threw him over his head. When they picked him up he was quite dead—his neck was broken.”

“God rest his soul!” was Philip’s instinctive response.

Sir Giles looked at him sharply, then his face twitched and softened.

“The furnace will need to be heated seven times hotter before his purgation is attained; but if you hold that prayers of yours or others may help the process, do not balk your charity! They shall take you to the chapel after you have dined. We will say good night now.”

He waved his hand, and dismissed him.

CHAPTER III.

“Naught is more honourable to a knight,
Nor better doth beseem brave chivalry,
Than to defend the feeble in their right,
And wrong redress in such as wend awry.”

—SPENSER.

As Philip passed out of the corridor, Mrs Gibson came forward to meet him. It looked as if she had been waiting for him.

“I will show you the way down-stairs, sir,” she said. “Dinner is laid in the breakfast-room, and you must be sorely in need of something to eat. It is my duty to look after you to-night.”

She preceded him as she spoke, and opened the door of an apartment where a large fire was blazing in the wide chimney: the incandescent mass of glowing coal had just been replenished, producing that union of intense heat and exhil-

arating flame which is an Englishman's ideal of comfort. In its cheery influence a small round table was set, with all the accessories of fine linen, translucent glass, and highly burnished silver, which he also holds to be indispensable for decent existence, but which struck young Methuen's eyes as elaborate and unnecessary. Almost immediately on his appearance the old butler of the house entered and deposited on the table a small silver tureen, from which an exquisite aroma issued, of the singular virtue of which I am bound to confess that Philip was too little of an epicure to form an adequate estimate.

“Sir Giles desired me to ask what wine you preferred, Mr Methuen ?” said the man, with an air in which deference and patronage were curiously balanced.

“I have no choice, for I never drink any,” was the answer, which was received in solemn undemonstrative silence, but with secret astonishment and displeasure. A Methuen who did not appreciate the traditional glories of the ancestral cellars was unworthy of his birthright.

Also he observed, as he rigidly fulfilled the functions of his office, that the young man was an indifferent and unappreciative eater, upon whom the delicacies of the *cuisine*, which the fastidiousness of Sir Giles had wrought to a point of perfection not often found in remote country houses, were signally thrown away. He evidently ate because he was hungry, and he was moderate to the point of provocation.

In fact, it was a positive relief to Philip when the formal and elaborate little dinner was brought to an end. Neither the excitement of his introduction to his uncle, nor the distraction of interests in which he had become so suddenly involved, sufficed to banish from his mind for many consecutive minutes the eager pallid face and desperate hopelessness of poor Lewis Trevlyan, and the pledge which he had himself given—a pledge he was already considering how best to fulfil. He was quite resolved that nothing should keep him at Methuen Place beyond the day of the funeral, and had calculated that by travelling day and night he might reach Florence early on the Saturday morning; but in

that case he must see the vicar's wife, if possible, this same evening—to-morrow would probably be beyond his control. But a good many hours still stretched between him and any reasonable time for going to bed ; and, unconventional as the season was for a visit to a stranger, the nature of his business and the hard pressure of circumstances would surely be sufficient excuse. He rang the bell, and it was answered, as he had hoped, by Mrs Gibson.

“I am going out,” he said, “if you will be good enough to direct me to the vicarage at Skeffington, and will explain to Sir Giles, if he should make any inquiries after me, that I had important business to transact there. Otherwise it will not be necessary to mention my absence.”

A cloud of disapprobation darkened her face.

“The vicar is not at home, sir,” she answered, “and the house is two good miles from Methuen Place. Sir Giles and Mr Sylvestre do not visit, and it would vex him very much that you should go there. Excuse the liberty I take, Mr Methuen, but to our notions it would not

seem proper that you should be paying visits before the funeral, and a little odd too, seeing we all understood that you were a stranger in these parts. Besides——”

She stopped short, then added, with a dull flush of colour rising in her sallow cheek, and encouraged by a second glance at Philip, “Besides, we did all hope that you would please the master, and this would be going contrary to him at once.”

“I am very sorry, but this business of mine which takes me to the vicarage is not a matter of choice. I shall be quite prepared to tell Sir Giles all about it if he should care to listen. To-night is the only opportunity I should have ; and it is not the vicar but Mrs Sylvestre I want to see. Is she likely to be at home at this hour ? Do you know her ? I should be glad if you would speak to me frankly.”

Mrs Gibson drew up her tall spare form with an air of dignity impugned.

“Living in Skeffington for the last forty years as I have done, it’s a need - be that I should know her, though few and far between

are the words we have exchanged with each other. She knows every man, woman, and child in the parish, and she's more vicar than the vicar himself. She is a masterful woman, Mr Methuen, with a hard cold eye and a heart to match. Not a bad sort altogether, I dare-say, but a woman whom love never comes near. She has three nice little girls ; and I believe she and the little governess they keep work very hard at their education, but they don't look happy, poor things ! Another thing where she has hurt and angered the master is, that she is dead against all Catholics ;—she has even talked to Sir Giles himself, and he is too much of a gentleman to be rude to her. There are plenty of charities connected with this parish, but she takes care no one outside her own church gets the benefit of them. She is terribly hard on Dissenters and *Papists*, as she call us. If you want really to know what Mrs Sylvestre is, I could tell you some sad stories——”

“ Not now,” said Philip, “ or I shall have no courage left to go and see her, and nothing

else remains to be done. Please send me some stable-boy or helper as guide to the house, as I cannot spare the time to lose my way."

It was nearly eight o'clock when Philip found himself on the road to Skeffington. Had the season been a normal one, and the daylight served, he would have enjoyed as fair a sample of Dorset landscape, as he walked between the hedgerows which bounded his path, as he could possibly have desired. Beyond, on the right hand and on the left, stretched corn or pasture lands, almost to the verge of the horizon, save where the monotony was broken by a clump of farm-buildings, or some apple-orchard, shimmering, phantom-like, in the semi-darkness ; or again, by a gleam of the not far-distant sea, and of a broken line of lofty hills, the crests of two of which served as landmarks to home-coming vessels.

The straggling village when reached surprised Philip, both in regard to its extent and its unsightliness ; and even a hasty glance served to discover unmistakable indications of squalid poverty and degradation, which seemed to him

strangely incongruous in such close connection with the parsonages and country-seats of rural England.

The boy who had come with him as guide pointed out a picturesque ivy-covered house, enclosed by a high wall overgrown with greenery.

“Thic’s the vicarage,” he said, touched his hat, and retired.

Hastily turning round, Philip had time to perceive that the boy did not return on his steps as he had heard Mrs Gibson charge him to do, but disappeared within the portal of a cheery-looking tavern, the swinging signboard of which announced it to be the “Methuen Arms.”

Doubtless other causes than a landlord’s negligence and a priest’s apathy went to swell the sum total of Skeffington immorality.

The entrance-door to the vicarage was low and wide, and roofed by a heavily timbered, old-fashioned portico; within its shelter stood, in ugly green-wire stands, some evergreen shrubs and flowering plants. A curious heavy bell-rope hung outside the lintel, and seemed to solicit an appeal. Philip rang it more than

once, in spite of a fair exercise of patience, before the door was opened, and even then the maid-servant barred his entrance rather than invited it.

To his inquiries whether Mrs Sylvestre were at home, she answered with evident reluctance in the affirmative, but begged to know what his business might be, before allowing him to advance farther than the hall. Philip took out a card and wrote a few explanatory words upon it, doubting very much whether they would be legible, as there was no light beyond that supplied by the now moon-illumined twilight; the lamp which hung from the lobby ceiling not being utilised.

He stood for some time, with increasing anxiety as to the lateness of the hour, and the seeming impropriety of his absence at such a time from his uncle's house, when suddenly a rush of voices reached his ears. Down the dim staircase came the sound of a child's voice, weeping bitterly, and protesting feebly through its sobs; the high clear notes of an angry woman's shrill but restrained

treble, and the low rich baritone of a young man's organ.

"I assure you, Mrs Sylvestre, the fault is mine, entirely mine! and yet I had not the least idea we were eating forbidden fruit, Dolly and I. Please don't scold her any more—I repeat I led her into mischief."

Then came a tender wail: "Indeed, indeed, mamma—" interrupted by a voice of judicial severity—

"*Scold* is a word scarcely to be applied to a mother's distressed and reasonable displeasure. I never scold, Mr Earle! Go to your room, Dorothy, and we will renew the subject to-morrow, when you will have slept upon your disobedience, and be better prepared to admit the justice of your punishment."

Then came another burst of distress, which, in its intensity, almost brought Philip to the foot of the stairs.

"Oh please, mamma, forgive me to-night—do forgive me to-night! I shan't sleep a wink!"

At this crisis, the servant had evidently

ventured to approach with his own card, for Mrs Sylvestre turned sharply round upon her.

“What is it, Janet? Don’t you know better than——”

And then a sudden silence fell. Philip heard the child’s retreating footsteps back to her room, a whispered word from the masculine voice, and the next moment a young man had precipitated himself down the few shallow stairs, and would have come into collision with him had he not avoided the sudden charge by a swift movement of retreat.

“Who the devil are you?” cried the voice, with an accent of intense irritation, due rather to the recent incident than the present surprise.

“I beg ten thousand pardons!” he hastened to add, having now set light to the hall-lamp from a box of matches he produced from his pocket, and discovered his mistake. “I thought no one could stand on that hall-mat but one of the Skeffington paupers,—a gentleman is so rare a visitor here that Janet, as you see, has no experience to fall back upon. Do let me repair her mistake, and take you into

a sitting-room. Perhaps you don't know the vicar is away from home at present?"

It was not often that Adrian Earle roused himself to so much active intervention on behalf of a stranger, or that his languid tones assumed so much charitable vivacity; but the meagre glimmer of the hall-lamp fell direct upon Philip Methuen's person, and he received at that moment the impression which abode with him more or less through all the years of their subsequent intercourse. It was not so much the attraction of beauty of feature or perfection of physical development that touched him, though few were more susceptible to external influences of the kind, but something in the expression and general aspect that won his immediate recognition and regard. At least, he had never seen one of his own age and sex who moved him so strongly.

Love at first sight is an accepted possibility, but may not friendship also be as swift and tender in its inception? When the "soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David," speech had not even passed between them.

There is no deeper and no diviner mystery in being than the sense of spiritual kinship which suddenly stirs and quickens in two human souls, brought perhaps for the first time together, and ignorant of the past record of each.

“I am Adrian Earle,” he said, and held out his hand. “Will you tell me your name?” But before the other could answer, Mrs Sylvestre came forward and broke the colloquy.

“I have the pleasure of bidding you good night, Mr Earle,” she said; and then, addressing the stranger in a tone of freezing distance, as if afraid of some burst of familiarity on his part—“If you are really Mr Philip Methuen, will you be good enough to follow me.”

A few moments more and they were seated opposite each other in a fireless room; but Philip was conscious of a momentary slackening of interest in his embassy, and that his attention was fixed upon the closing house-door and retreating steps upon the gravel.

When he had recovered himself, he found that Mrs Sylvestre sat awaiting his communi-

cation with a demeanour so deliberately expressionless as to tax the courage of any advocate.

He half doubted, as he looked at her, if any fate might not be happier for Anna Trevelyan than an asylum with her aunt. Contact, he perceived, would mean conflict.

“I understand from your card,” said Mrs Sylvestre, referring to it, and breaking the awkward silence from some instinct of courtesy, “that I have the honour of a visit from Mr Philip Methuen, and that he excuses the unusual hour he has chosen on the plea of business of pressing importance. I own I am at a loss to understand how any matter that concerns him can concern me. If you are the bearer of compliments or concessions from Sir Giles Methuen, my husband is not at home to reply to them.”

“No,” said Philip, quietly; “my message is to you only, and it is from your brother, Lewis Trevelyan.”

He had calculated upon her insensibility to emotion, and was startled by the sudden change of colour and aspect.

“Forgive my abruptness, but my time is so short that it must plead my excuse. I have the honour to call Mr Trevelyan my friend, and I left him last Monday in a condition so near death that it is a question whether I shall find him alive on my return, even if I succeed in getting back to Florence by Saturday. One duty which has brought me to Skeffington is, as you probably know, to attend my cousin’s funeral; but I should have come without that call.”

He paused and looked at her, as if his own sincere and kindly sympathy would evoke hers.

“You are waiting for me to ask you why you would have come, and I do ask you. What is the connection between your friendship for Lewis Trevelyan and your visit to me? Has he made no provision for his funeral expenses? Does he clinch the dishonour of a life by this last appeal to a sister’s charity?”

Her cheeks burned with a crimson spot of colour, and her large prominent blue eyes scintillated with passion; but it was passion held well under control. Philip met her gaze with

one of equal steadiness, until she flinched a little under the stern displeasure of his face.

“Words like yours,” he said, “are such as we regret on our deathbed; and they should close this interview, Mrs Sylvestre, if it were a time to consult personal feeling. But I do not lose sight of the fact that you have suffered deeply through your brother, and that the better feelings of the heart are often belied by hasty words. If you could see him as I saw him last, I think you would blot out his transgressions against you, and consent to relieve his mind of the cruel anxiety he feels on behalf of his daughter Anna. I am come here to ask you if you will take her home when her father is dead?”

A curious expression which baffled him came over her face.

“I like your courage and your directness,” she said. “One more inmate in a poor parson’s family to feed, clothe, and educate is of course a matter of small consideration to an inexperienced young man like yourself. Am I to believe that Lewis Trevelyan sanctioned this

appeal? that, after having robbed me of fortune and happiness, he has the effrontery to ask me to make a daily sacrifice for the benefit of his orphan? I decline absolutely."

"He was reluctant; but I overruled his reluctance. I thought the very wrongs of which you complain might have disposed you the more readily to do your duty, as having the greater virtue in the sight of God. I had the notion that good women welcomed sacrifice, especially those who have endured the discipline of motherhood; at least I thought you could not turn your back on your brother's child. I still think so."

"Every word you utter," she answered, with concentrated bitterness, "is an offence. Put your orphan into some of your charitable asylums abroad! You may gauge the depth of my repugnance, when I tell you I should feel no compunction at knowing she was to be brought up in a creed which to my mind means perdition. What you say shows me you also are 'a holy Roman'; but your argument has no weight with me. Has my brother joined your

communion? It makes gracious provision for reprobates and sinners such as he."

"You have pronounced its highest encomium, madam," said Philip, with a smile; "but I regret to say he has not, nor has his daughter Anna been educated as a Catholic. To be honest, her education, both religious and secular, has been greatly neglected, and her character is such that the charge of her would not be a light one. Mr Trevelyan is not without friends or resources, and arrangements would be made to guarantee the guardians of his child £200 a-year."

"That is a fact you should have mentioned first. If I report this conversation to my husband, he will advise me—to turn my maternal discipline to account and sacrifice myself!"

The sneer was so heartless that it very much qualified Philip's satisfaction in the success of his mission. At the same time he recognised the possibility that Mrs Sylvestre was not so bad as she chose to appear; that there would be the decent restraints of social opinion and the probable kindness of other members of the

family working in Anna's behalf. He recalled with satisfaction Dorothy's pleading voice, and the terms of familiar intercourse on which Adrian Earle appeared to be with the household. Any way, nothing more was in his power.

"I understood you to say that the payment you mentioned would be *guaranteed* to the guardians of the child? I am not in the least ashamed to own that what I refused to do as a matter of duty or charity, I am prepared to do on the score of advantage to my family."

Philip's brows contracted a little.

"The money shall be paid half-yearly through an old-established bank in Paris. If you have any further suggestions to make, they shall receive due consideration." He rose to take leave. "I dare not stay any longer," he added. "Am I to understand you will receive Anna?" He looked round the colourless room and into the face of its mistress. "Bear with one word more, Mrs Sylvestre. You do not love this girl—and, I will allow, you have no reason to do so—but you accept the charge of her for

a fair pecuniary equivalent. You will be just to Anna Trevelyan, you who resent so strongly the injustice you have endured from her father?"

Mrs Sylvestre smiled.

"I will be just to Anna Trevelyan, according to my lights, Mr Methuen; but my point of view is not the same as yours. How old is she? Describe her!"

"She is fifteen, well-grown and healthy, intelligent but very ignorant, having lived a wild life in the home of an Italian peasant, her foster-mother, when her father's health prevented him from having her with him."

"She can read and write, I presume, and speak her father's language? Is she a beauty?"

"The time is not yet come to decide the point, and I am no judge. She can certainly read and write."

There was a pause, during which Philip was conscious of a searching examination.

"You are at St Sulpice, educating for the priesthood, and have obtained leave of absence for your cousin's funeral?"

“That is so,” he answered, “and there is nothing more to say about me. I have the honour to wish you good night.”

She returned his bow without extending her hand, and he found his way to the house-door unattended.

CHAPTER IV.

“ Shall we with temper spoiled,
Health sapped by living ill,
And judgment all embroiled
By sadness and self-will,
Shall we judge what for man is not true bliss or is ? ”
—M. ARNOLD.

MRS GIBSON met him as he re-entered his uncle's house.

“ Sir Giles has asked for you, Mr Methuen, and I was obliged to say you were gone out, sir, and where. He was terribly put out. I am afraid he will get no sleep to-night. It is a bad beginning ! ”

“ Shall I go to him ? I can put all right with a word.”

“ No ; he gave orders he was to be told when you came in, but that he did not wish to see you. He asked if you had been to the chapel.”

“I am ready to go there at once, if you will show me the way. I suppose,” he added, with some hesitation, “that the watch has been duly kept?”

“The servants have relieved each other,” she answered, “and the Sisters of the Good Shepherd at Trichester have attended as they could, but they are few, and their duties are heavy. Father Francis came a few hours ago, and has undertaken to stay till morning.”

They crossed the full length of the house, and descended a short flight of stone steps, which led to the small isolated structure which had been fitted up and consecrated as a chapel more than two hundred years ago. It was now seldom used except as a mortuary. Giles Methuen had never been devout, and a priest had long ceased to form part of his domestic establishment. They entered the chapel together: it was heavily draped with velvet hangings, which had grown old in the service of the family. All light was excluded but that which was supplied by the huge wax-tapers burning on the bare neglected altar, and at the head and

foot of the coffin, which was covered by a voluminous velvet pall, with tarnished fringe of bullion, and the arms of the house emblazoned in gold.

A man knelt at the foot of the coffin, supporting the weight of his body against it. He did not stir as they entered ; Philip perceived at a glance that he was profoundly asleep.

He had dismissed Mrs Gibson on the threshold, and as soon as the door had closed upon her, he went up and surveyed the figure. His feeling was that of indignant reprobation as towards a sentinel found sleeping at the post of duty, but his anger softened as he saw the grey hairs, frail figure, and worn face of the defaulter.

“ Doubtless the spirit was willing, but the flesh is weak,” he said to himself, “ and I am here to supply his lack of service.”

He looked down at the length and breadth of the coffin, which testified to the fine physical development of the dead, and recalled the terrible words spoken by the unloving father that day.

Death in the bloom and prime of life always

seems an anachronism or a penalty, especially when the blow has fallen without warning. But to have met such a fate unlamented—to be consigned without reluctance to the grave—was a moral ignominy against which the young man's sensitive soul cried out.

He drew his breviary out of his pocket, and knelt down to commence his night's vigil with a religious fervour which amounted almost to passion.

Even death was no barrier between the guilty soul and the mercy of its Judge, so long as the prayers of saints and priests intervened: only he, alas! was but half-way to the divine privileges of the priesthood.

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The next day the blinds were drawn up, and the windows thrown open at Methuen Place, admitting the keen spring air and reluctant sunshine. In the household arrangements there seemed a certain eagerness to wipe out all traces of the dead man who had just been laid to rest among his ancestors.

The bed-chamber he had occupied when alive

was already in the hands of the housemaids, Mrs Gibson herself superintending their work, and placing carefully under lock and key, or otherwise hiding from sight, all the personal belongings of Mark Methuen.

These were of a kind which justified such haste. First came scores of female photographs, many of which bore the autograph of presentation upon them, ranging from the modified offence of vapidity or effrontery through the complete circle of provocative indecency.

Betting manuals and French novels of the lowest kind were the only literature which lay ready to hand on the shelves and available surfaces of the room; while there was something curious in the accumulation of cigar-cases, pocket-books, and receptacles for cards, letters, fusees, and so forth—most of which were more costly and ornate than a man is accustomed to buy for himself. Possibly there was a link of connection between them and the originals of some of the photographs: they may have represented the return for wasted health, wealth, and character.

Sir Giles Methuen had borne his part during the funeral service with great dignity and composure. If the tender grief of the bereaved father were lacking, there was a far more poignant anguish in the consciousness that such grief was impossible. Every phrase of religious submission or aspiration—the devout formulas which imply mental distress and suggest consolation, the condolences offered by friends (thoroughly acquainted with the facts of the case) with the conventional air of pity and sympathy—were each and all a separate stab to the sensitive heart of the proud old man. He excused himself from the luncheon which was served on their return from the chapel, but not before he had presented Philip to them as his nephew and heir, and begged that they would look upon him as his representative at the table.

As soon as he had left the room, the mental atmosphere brightened—the air of decorous depression and gravity disappeared, and a general sense of relief restored each man to his natural character. Condolences were exchanged for

congratulations, and bumpers filled and emptied to Philip Methuen's good fortune.

“The king is dead ! Long live the king !” cried Sir Walter Earle, a baronet whose ancestors had fought beside Harold at Hastings, and whose honour had been kept up, until the present generation, by a race of warriors. “But how is it we are welcoming him for the first time to-day ?”

The tone and glance conveyed a compliment. He was a much-travelled man of the world, to whom life and society had been both a career and a success, and his practised eye saw in Philip welcome marks of distinction and individuality.

“Come,” he added, “you must pledge us in return. We have left all our regrets in the Methuen vault, and are prepared to be on the best of terms with the new heir.”

Philip hesitated ; then said, as he touched his glass with his lips—

“I hope you won't discredit my gratitude because I acknowledge your kindness in water. I never expected to find myself in this position,

and have had no training for it. But—did my uncle never speak of me to any of his friends? Do you know nothing about me?"

"Beyond the fact that a nephew existed, we knew very little," replied Sir Walter, smiling. "The truth is, that I was your father's friend in the old times, and ventured to resent the treatment he received from his brother at his marriage—naturally he has not made me his confidant."

"My father's friend!" repeated Philip, his whole face alight with sensibility. "If at some future time you will talk to me about him, I shall be more grateful than words can express."

"The sooner the better, my dear fellow. You speak with his voice, which is another claim upon my goodwill. But where have you been in hiding all these years? Yours are not the manners of Oxford or Cambridge, and yet it is evident your mother has done her duty in your education."

"I was six years in England, after my father's death, under the charge of one of his old col-

lege friends. Since that time I have been at the Seminary of St Nicholas in Paris, then some years at Issy, and the last five at St Sulpice."

"At St Sulpice! I thought that was only an institution for priests?"

"And my destination is the priesthood."

There was a general movement of amused astonishment.

One man remarked, caressing his well-trained moustache, and gazing at Philip as if he had been some *lusus naturae*—

"It seems almost as odd in these days for a man to talk seriously of going in for the priesthood, as it would for her Majesty to announce her intention of touching for the king's evil!"

"It seems?" repeated Philip, quietly—"that is from your point of view. To me and many others it would be hard to find a point of resemblance between an act of ludicrous assumption and the solemn choice of a profession."

"But," interposed Sir Walter, bent upon fore-stalling a rejoinder, "at least we are all well

pleased that, since poor Mark has died, he died in time to prevent your putting the seal on your vocation. They may look elsewhere for recruits. Nature never intended that head of yours for the tonsure. We will show you the other side of the shield!"

Philip, anxious to divert attention from himself, allowed the remark to pass unchallenged, and, after a little more general conversation, the guests rose to take leave.

Sir Walter Earle shook him cordially by the hand.

"Come and see me as soon as you can. We are a mixed household at Earlescourt, but not without points of interest. My eldest son is about your own age, and at once my pride and my despair; my youngest—but it is hardly worth while to disclose my skeletons myself. One word more. I have been speculating how you and your uncle will get on together. It will be a new thing for Sir Giles to have a young man of your sort to deal with; take care that you don't both make serious mistakes."

The question of how they would get on to-

gether was very soon to be decided, as Philip received a summons from his uncle as soon as the latter had learnt that he was alone.

Sir Giles Methuen was sitting in the same place as on the preceding day, and looked, if possible, still more frail and broken down. He signified to Philip to take a chair opposite to him, and sat examining him in silence for several minutes. Then he said—

“I suppose it is your foreign education which has deprived you of the national grace of *mauvaise honte*. Few young men in your position would stand investigation as you do. You do not even change colour or look uncomfortable. Ah, I am glad to see you have the grace to blush a little!”

“If I do not look uncomfortable, I have more self-command than I thought, for I feel profoundly uncomfortable. I have so much to say that I know it will displease you to hear.”

Sir Giles frowned impatiently.

“I never knew any one more anxious to force a quarrel than yourself. However, I insist upon

the right my age and position give me to have the first word. Before you tell me your intentions, Philip Methuen, I will lay before you my wishes."

He stopped a little as if to arrange his thoughts, then went on—

"I am, as you see, a disappointed, broken-down old man. I look seventy, but am, in fact, ten years younger, and inclined, even at this date, to retrieve my life. I have always considered myself more keen-sighted and acute than other men, and no man has blundered more. I have a warm heart, though no doubt you think otherwise; and I have suffered in all the relations of life. My wife died when a girl; of my son I need speak no more. My brother, whom I loved tenderly, turned against me, sacrificing me and all natural interests for the sake of a selfish frivolous woman, who only married him under a mistaken notion of the contingent advantages. He paid his penalty, of course; but I do not forget that she who spoiled his life is your mother, and that it will ill become me to abuse her to her son. As her

son, you probably know more of her capacity to make a man miserable than I do, or even than your father did, who laid down the burden after some seven years' experience of it."

"I am at least under the deepest obligations to my mother, who has carried out my father's wishes and my own in the most honourable manner."

"Ah," said Sir Giles, "is that so? Your father, as you probably know, inherited from our mother an income of £500 a-year—£300 of which he left to his wife for her free use and maintenance, and the remaining £200 to his son, to be spent on his education until he attained his twenty-third year, and to be at his own disposal afterwards. I conclude he destined you for the priesthood, that you might escape the rock on which he foundered. It was odd his scheme was willingly accepted by you; things don't often turn out like that. I presume you are acquainted with these particulars, and that you refer to them when you speak of your mother's honourable fulfilment of her engagements?"

“Just so. I have known the terms of my father’s will for many years, and they have, I repeat, been faithfully carried out. No boy could have received a more careful or unbroken education. The expenses of it must have often exceeded the stipulated sum, and hampered my mother; indeed she has sometimes complained on this point.”

“She has? I am not surprised,” returned Sir Giles, with his keen glance following with amused interest every change of expression in his nephew’s face. “You see she chose to live in Florence while you were in England or in Paris, and travelling expenses count. Also, as you grew up, your demands became a little exorbitant. You must not only at Issy engage a professor of Hebrew for your own special edification, but you must learn music, fencing, etching (I believe that was the precise hobby) of professors who came out from Paris to teach you. I own it is a little difficult to harmonise this devotion to worldly pursuits with professed renouncement of the world, and with the declared intention of carrying the acquired gifts

and graces as proofs of your vocation as a missionary into the Corea. But what is the matter, nephew? Have you any fault to find with the accuracy of my statement?"

Philip had turned very pale; his practised self-control was being put to a hard test.

"I entreat you," he said, "if you have things to tell me that I do not know, to tell me them plainly, and not in this vein of banter and mockery."

There was such a look of pain in the expression of his face, that it touched Sir Giles more than he chose to admit. It was evident that the young man had believed in his mother.

"I am anxious not to be misunderstood," he returned in the same tone as before, unwilling, from long habit, to give his natural sensibility way. "No doubt you gauged your own requirements correctly; and at least the result is satisfactory. The money has not been thrown away. You are a very accomplished and presentable young fellow, and excellently well drilled, not for the vocation you have chosen, but for that of diplomacy, to which I have good

means of introducing you. You shall win the triumphs I have missed."

"We will, if you please, leave all that for the present. I must press for an explanation of what you have just now said."

He got up as he spoke in his agitation, and then sat down again, vexed that he betrayed himself so much. But the blow he had just received struck deep.

Sir Giles watched him a few moments in silence.

"In one word, Philip, I mean this. *I* have defrayed all the charges of your education up to the present hour, and if they have not run on the lines I have just now traced, well, I refer you for the explanation to Mrs Methuen. Ladies are accomplished casuists, and she no doubt felt justified in mulcting her husband's elder brother to cover her own personal extravagances. I believe her *salon* is quite a fashionable rallying-point in Florence."

Philip turned away from his uncle's relentless scrutiny. There was a look almost of desperation in his face.

"What shall I do?" he asked. "How can I

find the means of restitution? It is in my heart to say I will never forgive her."

"Don't say it, nephew. Surely more patience and humility should be the outcome of your spiritual discipline. You will shake my confidence in the Abbé de Sève! As for restitution, I am going to lay claim to that. Fill the place that has been always empty,—be a son to my old age, and I will reckon your mother's frauds washed out. Refuse if you are so minded; but you will discover that it will cost both of us dear."

It was evident that the young man was unable to answer immediately. After a long pause, which Sir Giles made no attempt to interrupt, he said—

"With your leave I will go away for a while; I find I am unable to recover myself; I may say what I shall be sorry for."

"Very likely, but that will only be a bond of union between us. My dear boy, I will not let you go away—I had no idea this would have hit you so hard. I thought you knew your mother—more or less."

Knew his mother! He recalled the claim she had always made upon his gratitude, on the ground of the education she had sacrificed so much to secure, and how he had met those claims. She had always resisted his modest appeals for an addition to the meagre sum she allowed him for pocket-money, which the ardour of his charity rather than any wish for self-indulgence made so cruelly inadequate, and had also curtailed his necessary expenses within so strict a limit as to leave no margin for self-denial, even to his enthusiasm. Circumstances recurred to his memory when he had besought her help with passionate insistence in some of the crises of his life, and had invariably been repulsed and reproached on plea of the poverty he taxed so heavily.

Not that he much regretted these past deprivations,—all that went for little: what did count was, that he had a mother whom he could not honour. Sir Giles had spoken of her *frauds*—it was an inclusive term for shameful acts of selfish dishonesty and imposture; but to have his filial reverence thus torn up by

the roots seemed, in the first moments of bitterness, to make all life barren and unprofitable.

“Let us wind up this subject, once and for all,” resumed Sir Giles. “Your mother has not deceived me, for I took means against her doing so. Wherever you have been, nephew Philip, I have had a correspondent at headquarters who kept me closely informed of your goings-on. I know what money you have had to spend, and how you spent it. I know perfectly that a Hebrew professor has been on the staff at Issy and St Sulpice ever since the days of good M. Olier. I know, outside of your professional training, that you took lessons of a poor broken-down violinist, and how you earned the money to pay for them. I know that my good friend, Monseigneur d’Enghien himself, provided a fencing-master for those of the pupils destined for missionary enterprise, on the sensible theory that the soldiers of the Church militant should not be worse disciplined than their secular brothers-in-arms. I know—but I will spare your feelings. I must add, however, that the studies

in etching were too heavy a draught upon my credulity."

He stopped, and looked again with mixed anxiety and amusement into the other's face.

"I see you have the implacable temper of your race—you will not forgive the woman who betrays you. But console yourself with the knowledge that your mother never drew out of my purse more than I had made up my mind to part with. When your father died, I set apart a yearly sum for your benefit; and I may as well add, for further disguise is unnecessary, that without strict supervision my intentions would have been frustrated. Your mother resented the outlay on your education, though she had not to find the funds, and would have saved out of it if she had been allowed the chance. For the rest, I suffered her to stint and pinch you, regarding it as a salutary discipline for an elect priest and missionary. Now all that is changed."

"Are these facts known to any one else?"

"To a certain extent to our family solicitor,

who made your father's will, and knows its provisions have not been fulfilled."

"And can I not make good my legal claim to £200 a-year under the provisions of that will?"

"Undoubtedly you can, as well as to the £3000, more or less, which Mrs Methuen has appropriated to her own purposes; but you will have neither need nor inclination to do either. Let Madam keep the poor income, which, even at its best, is too small for her requirements. I will take care to give you an allowance at least equal to what you forego."

"It will not be the same thing. I have a right to the one, the other will be an act of grace, and I shall not feel free to spend the money as I like."

"You will be absolutely free to do so," returned Sir Giles, with a slightly irritated manner; "but may I ask if, on making your escape from the immaculate restraints of St Sulpice, you have already found a channel for the immediate disbursement of £200 a-year?"

Philip looked up, quick to detect the change of tone.

“Pray forgive my bad manners,” he said eagerly. “I have forgotten in my distress to acknowledge the extreme kindness and forbearance you have shown both to my mother and me. But, as to the money,—I confess I should greatly prefer to have my own. £300 a-year ought to be enough for my mother’s needs.”

“Needs, yes; but wants is another thing.”

“It will be well for her to restrict her wants to her necessities.”

Sir Giles’s eyes flashed with amusement.

“You are like all the rest of the saints, nephew, bent upon inflicting penal chastisement upon the sinners; but you ask for more than the poor lady can perform. At the same time, I gather that the £200 a-year you bargain for is only to be an instalment of your own expenditure?”

“You have every right to twit me, and I have put myself in a position I ought not. I will tell you all I can. I want this money to meet a claim to which I have pledged my credit, without sufficient consideration, I confess, but I relied at its being absolutely at my own

disposal ; and, any way, it is pledged beyond recall. I had calculated that my technical education being complete, I could pay for my residence at St Sulpice by my services ; or to be more candid, I am afraid, under extreme pressure of circumstances, I had not properly considered the consequences of being penniless. That state of things is not quite unknown in the college, and can be endured. Moreover, if I am sent to the Corea, there will be no more question of personal expense : there is a fund to meet all such charges."

" And it does not hurt your pride to stand in *formâ pauperis* like this ? "

" If it did, I should take it all as part of the day's work. You will understand, Sir Giles, that my heart is set upon the work in question—that I have ordered my life and schooled my mind for this object. I am fit for no other, and no other has worth or purpose enough in it to give it value in my eyes. I have neither capacity nor inclination for politics, and should fail for certain, causing you more vexation and disappointment than going

back to my old calling will do. A week ago you never proposed to know me."

"A week ago I had a son. I put my veto on the priesthood with whatever authority may lie with the head of the house, and out of regard to the interests of the race. If you prove stubborn, the name of Methuen dies with you."

"And if I should not prove stubborn, what guarantee is there that I may not be as unfortunate in my son as yourself? Why should you try and coerce me to a course of conduct which you have found fruitful of nothing but bitterness and dissatisfaction? As a priest or missionary, I am able to reconcile life and effort with duty; but I should find it hard to do that as a man of leisure and society, playing at the meagre game of diplomacy in its lower rounds, or as a reluctant husband constitutionally averse to the narrow selfishness of domestic life, and doing my part ill in it."

"My dear fellow," answered Sir Giles, tapping him affectionately on the arm, "you shall go back to St Sulpice, and lay this question before

our good Archbishop for his decision. To argue with a fanatic is wasted breath, otherwise I would remind you that the vapours of the cloister so hang about you that you cannot see clearly in the open air. You think yourself ice because you have never been near the fire. Simply, you do not know yourself. You have been taught to believe that duty and sacrifice have only one groove to run in. I tell you, if you want the widest field for their exercise, step outside your mystic circle into the world at large; and since you seem to have been born with a singular taste for martyrdom, there are large possibilities that you may win your palm and crown in those domestic relations of which you speak so contemptuously. Further still, I can find you savages in Skeffington who will almost compete in degradation with the yellow barbarians of the Corea, and who will receive your efforts in their behalf with even superior brutality."

Philip smiled. "I should be poaching upon Mr Sylvestre's manor, and should be warned off at once. I gratefully accept, however,

your permission to refer my decision to the Archbishop."

"And you pledge yourself to abide by it?" interrupted Sir Giles, sharply.

"Yes: for it will then become a simple question of obedience; but it grieves me to think of your disappointment. He will not release me."

"In that case I will set you a lesson in philosophy, and console myself, should you be this side of the Pacific, by receiving my *via-ticum* at no other hands."

He made a gesture of weariness, as though the interview had been too long for him, and Philip rose at once to go. After a little hesitation, he said—

"Before I leave you, I want your permission to go back to town to-night. I must, if possible, be in Florence by Saturday morning."

"Explain the necessity. Scarcely to bully your mother?"

Philip had the gift of lucidity. In five minutes he had put the facts without comment before Sir Giles,—that he had undertaken to be the ambassador of his dying friend

to Mrs Sylvestre, and was deeply anxious to take back to him the good news of his success.

“And that woman has consented to give her niece a home! Has she any fortune?”

“Barely enough to provide the equivalent which it is only fair for Mrs Sylvestre to require.”

Sir Giles pondered. “It is a curious coincidence, but I suppose you are not deceiving me. Go, if you will, and make haste to return. You will, of course, take Paris on your home-ward way, and will bring back to me Monseigneur’s dictum, whether good or bad.” He held out his hand to dismiss him. “It will not be necessary to see me again. I am over-tired. I shall send you a cheque for your travelling expenses, on the understanding that I will have neither thanks nor repudiation.”

CHAPTER V.

“ We leave behind,
As chartered by some unknown powers
We stem across the sea of life by night—
The joys that were not for our use designed ;
The friends to whom we had no natural right ;
The homes that were not destined to be ours.”

—M. ARNOLD.

THE interiors of the old houses on the Lung' Arno are picturesque enough when flooded with sunshine and warmth, and every window open to the magical scene outside. But at night, when darkness has wiped out the external world, and shut the inmates within the four walls of the dim, resonant, chilly apartments, without glow of fire or flame of familiar gas, no scene can well be more depressing.

In Florence, too, as in England, the weather had assumed suddenly a wintry chill, and iced-laden winds from the Apennines had swept

down the valley of the Arno, which a week or two before had blossomed and expanded under the breath of summer.

Wrapt in an old cloak, and shivering under the insufficient blankets which covered him, Lewis Trevelyan was lying on the comfortless couch on which he now passed both nights and days. By his side was a little table, on which stood a plate of strawberries and a basin of polenta ; but the chilled food had thickened round the spoon, and the fruit had lost colour and freshness. The large grate, where a fire would have been so welcome, was filled with cypress boughs ; and down the wide chimney the wind had so unobstructed a course as absolutely to make the sprays rustle.

A small oil-lamp was almost lost in the gloom of the big chamber, and barely sufficed to show the three occupants it held. One was the sick man, as we have said, another his daughter Anna, who was kneeling on a footstool at his side, with her long thin arms clasped about him, and her head pillow'd on his breast, but in such a position as to enable her to see his

face. Beneath his coverings he held one of the girl's hands in a close grasp pressed against his side.

Her posture, the weight of her body, lithe and slim as she was, and the stringency of her embrace, were absolutely painful to his physical sensations ; but he had no wish for relief—rather he would have liked to make the union so close between them, that the chill of death creeping over his own heart should be able to find the strong pulses of hers, that so they might have gone down to the grave together. Her warm fragrant breath, the intensity of her gaze, the passion of her embrace, the sharp curves of her girlish figure, had each a distinct stab of anguish for the man who was gazing blankly into her uncertain future.

Anna had only been fetched from the country late that afternoon by the Sister of Mercy, who was still in attendance upon them, and who, having found her earnest offers of priestly assistance repulsed, and her own timid ministrations rejected, had withdrawn far enough away not to disturb the privacy of father and

child, and watched the scene in helpless sympathy. They had been talking together, and he had told her of the possibility of having a home in England, and even had tried to make the prospect attractive in spite of his own misgivings, but he was now too exhausted for speech, and silence had lasted for some time.

The old Italian doctor had left instructions for his lips to be continually moistened with wine or milk; and the only sound which broke the stillness of the scene was the occasional movement of the good Sister, intent on the fulfilment of this duty.

Trevelyan submitted to it patiently; his anxiety to keep life in his veins and his brain clear until the day dawned, and with it the faint chance of Philip Methuen's arrival, was so intense as almost to bar the entrance of "the fell sergeant Death." It was upon this single point that his soul seemed to hang:—on the very threshold of the dim hereafter (he would have objected to the phrase of "the unseen world") he did not seem to have either power or will to cast a fear or a hope in

advance. He had speculated about religion, and surrendered his cradle-faith after a good deal of mental suffering and conflict ; but now, with the end in view, and the solution of lingering doubt so close as to be measured by minutes rather than hours, his spiritual paralysis was complete.

Would Methuen come in time to relieve the tension of his anxiety ? was the one thought under which every other yearning was buried. Life was over : it had been a lost game, not worth the passionate playing ; but miserable as he was, he left a child behind him endowed with the same faculties of pain and pleasure, and hopelessly entered for the race doomed before starting for defeat. Cheerless as he considered life's outlook to be, it would be some mitigation of his misery to see once more Philip Methuen's friendly face, hear the result of his mission, and any way pass on the future of the friendless girl into his hands.

As the night wore on, and the struggle for breath became more desperate, Anna had yielded to the necessity of changing her position in order

that the dying man might be raised higher on his pillows. He lay with his eyes fixed in the direction of the windows, watching for the first streak of dawn to reveal their glimmering squares, and straining his dulled senses to catch any sound of arrival.

Soon after daylight a cruel stroke of disappointment fell upon him. He heard footsteps upon the threshold of the house, and old Assunta's voice in garrulous greeting and surprise. A gleam of joy lighted up his sunken eyes, and an instinctive "Thank God!" sprang to his lips. The next moment the old doctor, Richetti, had tapped at the chamber door, and entered.

"Eh! whom have we here?" he asked, glancing down at Anna, who was crouching beside the sofa, holding her father's hand in both hers, and looking ghost-like in the dim dawn, with her pallid face, distended eyes, and masses of chestnut hair floating over her shoulders. It was only his form of greeting, for he knew the girl well enough. "I am come early, good sister," he went on, addressing the silent nurse, "for I knew I should be wanted."

He went closer to the couch, and shook his head ominously as he met the look of wan despair in Trevelyan's glazing eyes.

"What does he want?" he asked, testily. "Fetch a priest, good sister; nay, send Assunta, and take away the child—this is no sight for her!"

But neither his own strength nor hers would have sufficed to have loosened the convulsive embrace with which the girl had again flung her arms about her father, receiving as she did so his last strangled sigh upon her lips, and unconscious that her own wild cry of terror had added a keener pang to the ineffable stroke of dissolution.

A few hours after Philip Methuen arrived. He was profoundly grieved to find himself too late; but his grief was almost purely of an impersonal kind.

Lewis Trevelyan, sick and friendless in the city of his adoption, had first seen Philip in his mother's *salon*, and had been strongly attracted towards him. The former was, or fancied he was, but lightly considered by Mrs Methuen

and her circle of intimates, having in excess the tenacious sensibility which comes from the sense of social declension. He fancied that they all knew his history, more or less—the shifts and economies of his daily life, the isolation and dreariness of his surroundings, and appraised him accordingly. But the sickness, languor, and poverty which repelled others seemed to serve as points of attraction to the grave and noble-looking youth who, he said to himself, might have served as model for the St George of Donatello. Philip had visited him at every opportunity—had laboured for his spiritual enlightenment with a simple directness and ardour which were not to be baffled by Trevelyan's cynicism and indifference; but his efforts had not stopped here. He had been prompt to fulfil any service for him, even those of a humble and distasteful kind, with so much zeal and tenderness, that Trevelyan accepted them, though often with pain and reluctance, as proofs of personal attachment, when they were in reality deliberate acts of religion.

His kindness to Anna had been in its way

even greater than his kindness to her father, and had been rendered with that winning grace which appeared to those brought under its influence to be the result of their own merit or charm, but was, in fact, as much a matter of intention and training as a natural and spontaneous gift.

Neither Richetti nor the gentle old Sister had been able to prevail on Anna to leave her dead father's couch, or even restrain her passionate caresses and lamentations, still less, to take the food of which she stood in need. The old doctor, indeed, "who had little *finesse* or facility with womankind," welcomed Philip's arrival with effusion. He relieved him of all sorts of responsibilities, which Richetti had felt reluctant either to accept or refuse. Methuen was able to tell him decisively that the place of interment must be the Protestant cemetery, and to set his mind at rest on the subject of the necessary funds. These points settled, Richetti, with a comparatively light heart, undertook the somewhat vexatious arrangements connected with the funeral. Moreover, one of

Philip's first actions had been to press upon the physician what he considered a most munificent recognition of his long professional services, with the assurance of the deep sense of their value which Trevelyan had entertained, and that the sum he asked him to accept was not beyond, but below his merits. In answer to the old man's generous reluctance to deprive the little orphan of so much money, Philip assured him that her interests were fully secured,—that she had influential friends in England, who would at once take charge of her, and that there was full provision to meet all other claims.

To Anna's bitter disappointment and distress, he had not, in his first pre-occupation, taken so much notice of her as she had expected. He had, indeed, spoken a few kind words, and gently insisted on her leaving her father's side and taking the cup of chocolate and morsel of bread which old Assunta had brought up for her; but this done, he had whispered to the Sister that it would be well to take her into another room and constrain her to lie down and rest.

Anna's will had hitherto ruled all those who had the care of her, and she never hesitated for a moment to resist with violence the gentle woman's attempt to take her hand and lead her away, and then to rush once more to the side of the dismal couch and fling herself upon the body with renewed kisses and tears.

"I will lie here till they take him from me," she sobbed; "why are you so cruel as to want to part us?" And then she burst out with a piteous childish wail—"What shall I do? what shall I do? There is no one left who loves me!"

Philip went up to her, and lifting her up in his strong arms, he pressed her white tear-stained face against his breast.

"I gave my word to your father, Anna, that I would be your friend as long as I lived—let that comfort you a little!" He stooped over her and kissed her forehead. "My child," he said, "I love you dearly. I used to think you loved me too a little."

He could not, as he well knew, have soothed the passionate heart more effectually. She clung

to him with her arms locked round his neck, and showered kisses upon his face with almost convulsive ardour. For a few moments he let her have her way, then gently unclasping her hands led her back again to the Sister.

“Take her away now,” he said; “for my sake she will do as we wish.”

Anna went away submissively and lay down on the bed as desired, and suffered the kind Sister to cover her up warm and put her pillows into place; but when she would have kissed her, she turned away her head with a sharp movement of repulse. She tried to shut out the daylight with her hands clasped over her eyes —to shut out recollection and pain as well. There was only one way to do it: “I love you dearly,” she repeated to herself, “I love you dearly. Ah, Philip, I will love you for ever!”

Lewis Trevelyan was buried the next day. It was a civil funeral, for he had enjoined Methuen that no religious rites should be held over his body, and such engagements are sacred. But as the young man stood by that unhonoured grave, looking through the blinding sunshine on the

dusty roads which now encircle the once beautiful little Protestant cemetery, he took a stern satisfaction in the thought of the austerities by which he would seek to atone for this act of loyalty to his friend and disloyalty to his church.

Richetti, looking at his stern face, contented himself with a significant shrug and lifting of the eyebrows: in his estimate, all such matters were equal. His sympathies were with Trevlyan, and his sense of young Methuen's bondage to an effete superstition gave unconsciously an air of easy familiarity to his manner when he bade him good-bye.

Philip's next duty was to find some escort for Anna. There were nearly always visitors, either English or American, on the wing, who might consent to take charge of her. For the present, he had asked the good Sister to take the child back with her to her convent, and to provide her with a suitable outfit, giving her money for the purpose. He also smilingly suggested that if she could make use of the time by introducing into Anna's mind the idea of duty and submission to those in authority, it would be an

acceptable and beneficent work. The money thus spent in Trevelyan's behalf was part of Sir Giles's munificent gift to himself; for his examination of his late friend's papers soon showed him that the outstanding claims were more, and the balance at his bankers less, than stated. When everything had been settled, and old Assunta's fidelity recognised by a liberal gift, there was little more than thirty pounds left for poor Anna's inheritance, in spite of his own supplementary grants.

It occurred to Philip that he would deposit this sum for her benefit in the English Post-Office Savings Bank, so that she might have the little fund to fall back upon in case of some sudden emergency, and could please herself with the sense of importance and independence the arrangement would give.

He deferred the more important transaction of the yearly payment to Mrs Sylvestre till he found himself in Paris, where he proposed to avail himself of the bankers employed by the College. He had still some anxiety on this point. In the prospect of his becoming a priest,

he had decided to transfer his annuity under his father's will to Anna, taking his uncle into his confidence, and engaging his interest in her behalf. For the present he had still enough money left to send the first half-yearly instalment, which should be the first thing done on reaching Paris.

He gave but little consideration to the alternative of his position, not feeling any doubt that the appointed umpire on the question, the good Archbishop of Paris, would confirm his vocation. He had now been more than a week in Florence, and had not yet seen his mother, having left this painful duty to the last. If it had not been that he hoped she could help him to find a travelling-companion for Anna, he doubted whether, on this occasion, he should have visited her at all.

CHAPTER VI.

“ I must be cruel only to be kind ;
Thus bad begins, and worse remains behind.”

—*Hamlet.*

“ She cannot love,
Nor take no shape nor project of affection,
She is so self-endeared.”

—*SHAKESPEARE.*

MRS METHUEN occupied a portion of one of the charming modern villas which are built on the hillside just beyond the city, amidst the dull verdure of the cypress groves. A picturesque garden shut in the house, but the rooms had no local individuality about them ; they were prettily furnished, but after the taste of London or Paris. As Philip entered the *salon*, his mother was in the act of coming through the open window from the garden into the room. She held a bunch of yellow roses in her hand, and was dressed

with her usual careful elaboration in an effective dark crimson gown. She was a tall, and still a beautiful woman, generally considered like her son; and in respect to feature and physique this was true, only to render, to an acute observer, the radical difference of aspect and expression the more striking.

Her colour changed as she recognised her visitor, and she betrayed her agitation by dropping some of the flowers she held.

“Is it you?” she said coldly. “It was like your usual civility not to warn me of your return. What is the meaning of it? Have you quarrelled with Sir Giles already?”

Philip came forward, picked up the flowers which she had let fall, and in giving them again into her hand, raised it to his lips. But the movement was a mechanical one, he laid no kiss upon it.

“I have been more than a week in Florence, busy about Lewis Trevelyan’s affairs, who, you may probably know, is dead; but I have leave of absence from my uncle. I am come now not only to pay you my respects, but to ask

you if you know of any one going to England who will take charge of his daughter. She is to be adopted by an aunt."

"I don't know of any one," she answered impatiently ; "people don't leave Florence, but come to it at this season of the year. And what have you to do with the child ? Good heavens !" she added, as a new thought struck her, and starting back as she spoke, "of what did the man die ? You surely have not forgotten how nervous and susceptible I am on all points connected with illness ; it's as likely as not it was of some infectious disease !"

"Trevelyan died of slow decline. There is no danger," said Philip. He looked away from her as he spoke, lest his face should express too strongly the indignation he felt. He was perfectly aware that her selfishness was so absolute that she would scarcely have given herself the trouble to tax her memory or consult an acquaintance on the subject in which he was interested. He had long since fathomed the shallows of her nature, but until now he

had considered there was the one redeeming trait of fidelity to her obligations as wife and mother. She had never loved him,—more, she had been the goad and oppressor of his childhood; but he had said to himself, with a pathetic determination to keep some rag of filial feeling, that she was honest and conscientious, and therefore entitled to his respect. It was one of the heaviest blows he had yet sustained, to find that not even this consolation was left to him.

Mrs Methuen looked at him suspiciously. Whatever were her moral deficiencies, there was no bluntness of her faculty of observation, and she saw a change in her son's bearing towards her.

“What is wrong with you?” she demanded again. “You have been all this time in Florence, and have found no opportunity to come and see your mother! Considering that you are a slave to duty, is it not a little odd that you should have left me up to this moment without news of your uncle’s reception? I have looked for a letter in vain.”

“I admit I ought to have written—under

ordinary circumstances ; but I have been deeply engaged. As for my uncle, he has treated me with the greatest kindness and liberality, but no conclusion has been reached about the future."

"No conclusion ! I don't understand. You are his heir, I presume ? That is a conclusion already reached without your help or his. Are you to live with him ? What provision does he propose ? Why do you put me to the annoyance of asking questions it is your business to anticipate ? Under any circumstances, now that I fill the place of the dowager of the family, it will be necessary to increase my miserable income."

She laughed softly, and glanced towards a mirror.

"Whenever," answered Philip, "I find myself in possession of Sir Giles's title and fortune, I will not fail to do justice to my mother ; but I hope and believe that day is far distant. As long as he lives, I shall never ask him for anything on your account,—he knows your requirements better than I do. You have deceived me, but not him."

“Deceived!” she repeated angrily; but a glance at her son’s face told her that a show of indignant feeling would be thrown away. “Has the old man been blabbing,” she asked insolently, “of the innocent shifts to which my poverty and your necessities drove me? I consider that the little help he gave me was my due, or rather a very meagre portion of my due; and you are very much mistaken if you think I am going to cry *peccavi* because you choose to look upon me as a sinner! After all, it is a world of pities that you should not go into orders,—you would have played the part to admiration!”

“Then you will not be displeased to hear that such is still my intention, and that I am on my way to St Sulpice at this moment, with Sir Giles’s consent.”

But in fact such an event would have been the destruction of all her plans and hopes. Her ultimate intention was to remove her residence to London (probably to Sir Giles Methuen’s long disused house in South Audley Street), and to establish a lien on his property

commensurate with her position as mother of the heir. But this could scarcely be carried out if her son became a priest.

An angry spot burned on her cheeks, and the light of her eyes gathered and kindled. She looked at Philip with an expression in which rage and contempt were equally mixed.

“ You are a fool,” she exclaimed, “ as you always were, and as your father was before you ! But you make a mistake if you think I shall suffer myself to be made the sacrifice of your folly. There are ways and means that your simplicity doesn’t suspect, to bar your way to the priesthood. I will see Monseigneur myself; I have met him more than once in society, and I know he is a man of the world, and will hear reason. I will make a personal appeal to Sir Giles. You shall not throw away your chances ! ”

Here her voice shook a little, and tears of mortification softened her eyes. The thought had occurred to her that she might be going too far. If her son were to be in the future the foun-

tainhead of pecuniary supplies, it was impolitic to alienate his goodwill ; and there was a hardness of manner in his bearing towards her which was quite new, and decidedly disagreeable. She liked her own way, and was prepared to get it, regardless of what she trampled down, or stood upon in the process ; but it was disagreeable to her to be on bad terms with those allied to her. Therefore she added, in a more conciliatory tone—

“ You must see that you are doing me a grievous wrong ! ”

“ The fact of my becoming a priest,” he answered, “ will not invalidate my inheritance ; and if I live to succeed, I will make you whatever allowance the family solicitors think right. I am come to-day to discuss a painful subject. From a very early age you made me acquainted with the terms of my father’s will, and led me to believe that you had always carried them out at considerable sacrifice to yourself. I know now that such has not been the case. Let that pass—a son cannot accuse a mother ; but for the future I claim what belongs to me, and I

have arranged that my share shall be paid to my credit into the bank."

Mrs Methuen's face grew almost livid as she listened to him. A feeling of active hate sprang up in her heart as the quiet deliberate tones fell upon her ears; and she glanced at the beautiful face, cold and resolute as if it had been cut out of stone. Then, taking refuge in the last resource to which a woman turns when she finds herself detected and without excuse—

"You insult me!" she said, with a sob. "Whatever I have done has been done with Sir Giles Methuen's approval. As the head of the family, he volunteered to help me in the way you resent, and sanctioned my taking the benefit of his help. It has always been understood between us that as long as I lived I should continue to receive the full amount left by your father for you and me. At the best it is beggary. Your taking the step you threaten is nothing but a vindictive wish to punish me for the restraints and grievances of your childhood. I could wish now they had been greater!"

It was certainly to the credit of Philip's self-command that he checked the retort which rose to his lips, but he had schooled himself against any expression of personal feeling. He was, however, equally determined on carrying his point.

"Even my uncle," he answered, "has no power to alter the provisions of my father's will; and the trustees under it, who are, as you know, the solicitors for the Methuen estates, have already written to me on the subject, and asked for instructions as to the future. I have already answered their letter. When I received it I had no idea of your feeling in the matter, or that you would be a loser by my taking my own. I imagined that sum had been spent by you upon my education from a child."

"And that I had subsisted all these years on £300 a-year?" she asked with a sneer. "But if you do this thing you shall never see my face again!"

He turned a little pale. "Do not say that. I am constrained to do as I say, because it is

the only way in which I can carry out an engagement I have made. It is scarcely necessary to tell you that I would not do it for my own personal benefit."

"I am to understand, then, that you rob your mother with a view to enriching some beggar, or making spiritual capital out of it in some besotted form of almsgiving?"

"I have no explanation to give," was his answer. "I am of age, and the money is at my own disposal. One thing I can promise—in no future strait or exigence will I ever ask you for help."

"You would certainly ask in vain," she said, with a little laugh. But she felt daunted by the severity of his self-control, and to hide her discomfiture, added quickly—"All this time you tell me nothing. I insist upon knowing how things stand between you and Sir Giles. Is it your obstinacy about the priesthood which has led to his washing his hands of you?"

Philip gave her a succinct account of his reception by his uncle, and the few circum-

stances of his visit, and also of the permission he had obtained from him to refer the final decision to the Archbishop of Paris, Monseigneur d'Enghien.

A peculiar expression crossed his mother's face as she listened.

"I think I begin to understand," she said, "and am a trifle relieved. Sir Giles and the Archbishop are old friends, I know. I was afraid you had broken with your uncle. Under any circumstances, he is pretty certain to make you a handsome allowance—and yet you extort your pound of flesh!"

"If he should, I am prepared to give you back as much as I claim, or even more, if circumstances justify it. In that case you will forgive me, mother?"

"Does it matter?" she asked. "I have never been a fond mother, I own, and it is the glory of saints and priests to hold natural ties cheap. That is why I am almost inclined to allow that you have a vocation. No, Philip," answering the expression of his grave wistful gaze, "my maternal susceptibilities will never

answer to your demands. Still, I am not unwilling to order your room to be got ready."

"It will not be necessary: I leave Florence this evening. To-morrow night I sleep once more under the roof of St Sulpice."

He got up to take leave.

"You cannot help me in regard to Anna Trevelyan?"

"Not in the least! Put a label round her neck, if a girl of her age can't find her way alone, and don't bring ridicule and trouble on your head by mixing yourself up in other people's affairs. Words fail to express my contempt for the Quixotes of society! Let the aunt you mentioned fetch her or send for her. She is a disagreeable, ill-bred little monkey. Her father was once mistaken enough to bring her here."

"True; that was a mistake," he said, with a smile.

There was nothing more to say, and yet he lingered. His heart was full in view of the near crisis of his life, and he could not resist the instinctive desire to try and win some touch

of sympathy from his mother—because she was his mother—and no failure of hers could break that inexpressible tie.

“I must go,” he repeated, “and it is uncertain when we shall meet again. Mother, wish me success !”

“With all my heart,” she answered, “but not after your reading of the word. We shall meet again sooner than you expect.”

CHAPTER VII.

"When I look back upon my former race,
Seasons I see at which the Inward Ray
More brightly burned or guided some new way;
Truth in its wealthier scene and nobler space
Given for my eye to range, and feet to trace ;
And next I mark, 'twas trial did convey,
Or grief, or pain, or strange eventful day,
To my tormented soul such larger grace."

—J. H. NEWMAN.

It would be difficult and perhaps incongruous to describe the feelings with which Philip Methuen found himself once more within the walls of St Sulpice.

In these days, when faith in God has become a condescension, and the desire to save the souls of men a proof of deficient culture or narrow brain, the implicit belief and ardent devotion with which he took his part in the high religious festival which fell on the day following his arrival, would excite rather ridicule than sympathy.

During the years in which he had been a pupil in the seminary, the supreme government lay in the hands of one who regarded the character of its founder with profound veneration, and went nearer to restore the old order, and infuse the same spirit of consecration to the religious life, than had been done for generations past.

The Abbé de Sève held the belief that to know God experimentally, and then to live for no other object but to bring God and man together in living communion, was the highest condition of being that could be reached. He said to his pupils that this was the priestly function, and that to be worthy of it no discipline was too severe; that it demanded a faculty of self-sacrifice practically without limit, and that therefore every form of selfishness and love of pleasure or ease were mortal enemies, to be overcome at all costs. The Church in her tender wisdom stooped to indicate the ways and means best calculated to develop the growth of the spiritual life in the stubborn and sterile hearts of her sons.

To fast and pray, until nature faints under demands too heavy for the body to sustain,— to forego the so-called innocent enjoyments of youth in order to serve in loathsome hospitals, or fulfil some prescribed function from which natural pride and fastidiousness recoil,— to refrain from what is desired and accept the unacceptable,—were the appointed training for this warfare, and even then the victory was uncertain.

Such teaching is repudiated by the spirit of this age; but may not one be allowed to ask whether Reason herself can deny that it is right, and wise also, to sacrifice a lower for a higher good, and that the faculty of postponing the present pleasure to the future gain is allowed, even by advanced philosophers, to be one of the prerogatives of humanity?

Granting that a man believe in God, as God was interpreted by Christ, and accept the obligations of His service, and the incentive of His supreme example, extravagances and fanaticisms so-called fall into place.

In all human relations, the highest test of

devotion is held to be the sacrifice of personal interest and personal pleasure, and it follows logically that the devout Catholic should esteem the endurance of pain, shame, or contradiction, as proofs of his reasonable service.

No prize worth the gaining has ever been won by languid hearts or hands ; and if likeness to God is only to be attained by the denial of those tendencies which hamper and slacken our progress, nothing remains but to follow the metaphorical injunction, and cut off the right hand or pluck out the right eye, at any cost to our lower nature.

At least such was the view of life and duty which young Methuen had accepted, and which rendered him indifferent to the worldly advantages offered him, and eager to follow the vocation not only of priest but of missionary.

On the second day of his return, which was that fixed for the momentous interview with the Archbishop, he had risen before daybreak and gone into the chapel for purposes of private devotion ; as he entered, he was surprised and a little confounded to see the Abbé de Sèvre

prostrate before one of the side altars. As Philip hesitated a moment whether to advance or retire, he rose and came towards him.

“We are urged by the same necessity,” he said, with a grave smile, laying his hand on the head of the young man, who had knelt to receive the formal benediction. “My prayers have been for you, my son.”

“That I may be faithful to the calling on which my heart is set?”

The Abbé looked at his kindling eyes, and his brows contracted a little.

“It is not for the disciple to choose the work his Master would have him to do,” he answered, a little coldly.

“Do I presume to choose?” said Philip, humbly. “I think no task can be set me that I should not be willing to perform—as best I can.”

“That remains to be proved. Perhaps the hardest task of all is to be passed over without work set or duty prescribed,—that of being denied the indulgence of your own will, when you believe that will to be in conformity with

the Divine will. Go to your prayers, my son, but do not presume to indicate to the Supreme Wisdom the channels in which His grace shall flow."

Philip had become very pale, but he attempted neither question nor reply. His submissive respect broke down the Abbé's intended reserve.

"I stand condemned in my own eyes," he said, with a smile of great sweetness. "Of the family under this roof, Philip Methuen, you have been to me the Joseph; and where the sin of inordinate regard exists, the Divine Wisdom is apt to remove the stumbling-block out of one's path. It is for my chastisement, doubtless, that my son is to be sold into Egypt."

"Is it to be so? Accept my grateful thanks for giving me warning, and for all the goodness of which I am unworthy."

He spoke in a low tone, and with no outward signs of agitation, but they were practised eyes which watched him. What could the Abbé say to heal this wounded spirit?

“As long as we both live, I am your father and this is your home. I believe the work you may be called to do in the world outside may exceed in hardship and difficulty anything that would have fallen to your lot as priest or missionary even. I know your present repugnance to it, and the heroic youthful dreams which are to be disappointed. I know it, Philip. The probe is never applied except where the flesh is sensitive, and there is no harder word in Holy Scripture than this, ‘To obey is better than sacrifice.’”

A few hours later Philip was informed that, instead of coming to St Sulpice to confer with the neophyte, the Archbishop desired him to wait upon him at his own residence ; and there, in an informal way, he told the young man that, after careful consideration of the matter, he had reached the conclusion that his sphere of duty lay outside the Church. He pointed out in impressive phrases how, in these faithless and degenerate days, more might be done, even for the best interests of religion, by those who had the courage to live the divine life in

the thick of an indifferent and scoffing world, than in the close ranks of the clerical army.

He also reminded Philip of the claims his uncle had upon his duty, and of the social obligations which lay upon him, and which were recognised by the Church herself, to perpetuate a family which maintained the true faith in the midst of an inimical nation.

“Not,” he added, dropping the tone of the ecclesiastic for the man of the world, “that it is necessary to make a religious duty of a fore-gone conclusion. Love is as much a law of nature as is growth, and, without flattery, you are entitled to expect the best that it can give. Tell my good friend Sir Giles Methuen, that I shall hold myself at his disposal at any time to pronounce the nuptial benediction.”

And so the matter terminated.

On his return to St Sulpice, a letter was handed to Philip from his uncle, to the effect that he was to remain in Paris, at the seminary if he preferred, until Sir Giles joined him, as he proposed to give himself a holiday.

CHAPTER VIII.

“After April, when May follows
And the white-throat builds, and all the swallows !
Hark, where my blossomed pear-tree in the hedge
Leans to the field, and scatters on the clover
Blossoms and dew-drops—at the bent spray’s edge—
That’s the wise thrush : he sings each song twice over,
Lest you should think he never could recapture
The first fine careless rapture.”

—R. BROWNING.

THE village of Skeffington, situated in one of the most charming and fertile of English valleys, and surrounded by some of the loveliest scenery in Dorset, was in itself unsightly and unpicturesque. It stretched its devious way five miles in extent, and according to its proportions, included as much poverty and vice as could be found in the slums of any great city.

The present-day philanthropists might have culled from its swarming hovels examples of shameless degradation that would at least have

equalled in realistic offensiveness anything that the capital could have supplied ; and indeed Mr Sylvestre had been known to say that his experiences as a London curate had been outdone by Skeffington immorality. There was indeed a certain sluggish bovine element about it which distinguished it from the more aggressive forms which vice assumes in crowded centres, but perhaps this made it rather less than more amenable to reformation ; and there was also the redeeming physical fact that pure air and fresh water circulated round the miserable dilapidated cottages, which disgraced landlord and tenant alike.

Board schools (whatever their advantages) had not yet reached Skeffington,—not because it was so well served otherwise in this department, but that the inhabitants, headed by their vicar, strenuously resisted the innovation, and had succeeded, by statistics framed with a certain robust imaginativeness concerning the existing means of education, in conveying the belief that it was.

Mr Sylvestre, to whom a quiet life was the

supreme end of existence, naturally found it a matter of importance to be on good terms with the wealthy farmers of the district, and this could certainly not be the case if he had fulfilled his duty in forcing to school the little shock-headed lads who guided the plough in the heavy furrows, trudged alongside the ponderous waggons under the eye and whip of their carter-fathers, or scared the clamorous rooks from the seed-fields in the piercing cold of the early spring mornings. And still greater would have been the opposition of the parents themselves—the terrors of *Schedule B* were as yet undreamt of in this Arcadia.

Mr Sylvestre's predecessor had been a very old man, who had held the living for close upon fifty years, during the chief part of which he had been the best fox-hunting parson in a county distinguished for such professional hybrids, and had only reluctantly relinquished the saddle when his power to keep his seat failed him. His clerical functions had been restricted to morning service on Sundays, when he always preached an excellent sermon, selected from

some classic theologian on his book-shelves, and read prayers again in the afternoon. He visited the schools once a-week, when he invariably commended the diligence of the master, patted the heads of the elder scholars, and presented sugar-plums to the infants. He had a fine person and genial manners, and was by no means unacceptable to parishioners and neighbours. He kept a curate, not of the advanced type, as may be concluded, but a worthy dull man, who married, buried, and baptised for him, went occasionally to take the sacrament to some dying bed when sent for, and catechised the children in the schools.

No finer field for missionary enterprise could have been found than the village of Skeffington, if the right man had been chosen for the work ; but the Rev. Herbert Sylvestre was singularly destitute of the spirit of a reformer. Some improvements were inevitably introduced : the pretty old-fashioned Norman church, which had been rigorously closed from Sunday to Sunday, was now thoroughly cleaned and furbished, the neglected churchyard levelled, mown, and

planted. The schoolmaster was dismissed, and one a little more in harmony with modern requirements engaged and carefully overlooked. The new vicar thought education his strong point. Sunday-schools were established and pretty well served by the ladies of the village, who found such work an element of interest, with the zest of competition, in their sluggish lives, and also a means of *entrée* to the vicarage.

Social life could scarcely have been on a lower plane than at Skeffington. The wealthy farmers of the neighbourhood exchanged civilities,—that is, their womenkind visited each other, to play tennis and partake of high tea. Dinners were an unknown ceremonial: the men chiefly entertained each other at the two rival hotels at Crawford and Trichester, where the bi-weekly market-feasts were spread.

There was a little nest of rather superior houses gathered round the vicarage, which were occupied by a mixed and rather anomalous class. One was the hereditary property of a single lady, in advanced but vigorous middle life, and who served under Mr Sylvestre as honorary

curate, and helped his wife in the management of the new coal and clothing clubs she had established; another had been bought by a retired draper from the county town, whose family consisted of himself and his handsome dashing daughter; and the most charming cottage of all was rented by a young man and his wife, of the name of Mitchell, of apparent education and good manners, but whose antecedents were a little difficult to trace. He declared that he had been induced to take possession of the “delightful shanty” because of the facilities afforded by its numerous outhouses and sheds for the rearing of prize poultry, which was Mr Mitchell’s hobby, or rather one of them, as he was equally devoted to the rearing of wire-haired fox-terriers, and made of both an exceedingly remunerative pursuit.

There was an uncomfortable want of assimilation between these families and the neighbouring farmers, as also between both classes and the vicarage,—Mrs Sylvestre being accustomed to draw a hard-and-fast line between herself and her inferiors.

Within the five miles area there were only two gentlemen's houses — that of Methuen Place, which we know, and which was almost out of account as a factor in the social result, owing to the religious faith of its owners,— a faith held with almost passionate tenacity throughout the long period of political disability and oppression. It probably arose from this sense of isolation that so many of the men of the family had been students and scholars, living much abroad, and contracting many foreign ties of regard.

Sir Giles Methuen himself in his younger days had spent a great part of his time in Paris, where he had made, amongst others, the ecclesiastical friendship which had stood him in such good stead at the present crisis. The death of his young wife in childbirth, failing health, and the ever augmenting disappointment in his son, had aged him prematurely, and sapped his zest for life. Now, he promised himself to live again in his nephew.

The other house was of greater distinction, and belonged to the Sir Walter Earle of whom

we have already spoken. But Earlescourt was situated more than five miles from Skeffington, and, with the exception of Methuen Place, the inhabitants were held to be on a different social plane, precluding intimacy with a family which took foremost rank as one of the oldest and richest baronetcies of the kingdom. The only exception was owing to the allowed eccentricity of the eldest boy, Adrian, who sometimes paid visits to the vicarage in favour of little Dorothy Sylvestre, with whom he had made a chance acquaintanceship during a picnic held in his father's woods, and had conceived so strong a liking for the child as to give proof of it by taking her occasional presents of books, or toys, or fruit. It was on one of these occasions that he had come into contact with Philip Methuen.

Such was the general position of affairs on the day when Anna Trevelyan was to make her first acquaintance with English rural life. Philip Methuen had succeeded with some difficulty in finding an escort for her, and had written to Mrs Sylvestre requesting that, on the

date named, she would be good enough to send a suitable person to meet her niece at the Charing Cross Hotel, and convey her to Skeffington Vicarage.

Mrs Sylvestre resented this arrangement as a very unnecessary expense, and an act of impertinent dictation on his part; but as she had received by the same post her first half-yearly payment, she thought it better to comply. It was a singular fact that, whenever the question of absence from home arose between the vicar and his wife, it was always decided that he could be much better spared than she. And perhaps it was as well, as far as Anna's comfort went, that it was her uncle rather than her aunt who fetched her home.

But the hour and minute did arrive when she stood in Mrs Sylvestre's presence, in the colourless room which had witnessed the interview which decided her fate, and was confronted by the cold gaze of the kinswoman who hated her for her father's sake before the feeling of personal antagonism was aroused by the first sight of herself.

“Come here and speak to me, Anna, and I will introduce you to your cousins.” The voice was cold and unsympathetic; Anna was weary, excited, and confused by the unfamiliar aspect of everything around her. The three little girls stood together in a shy group without speaking, but gazing at her intently.

She was dressed in a straight black frock, which added to her height and her pallor; and from under her wide-brimmed straw hat masses of somewhat dishevelled chestnut hair fell below her waist; the fine dark eyes looked out before her with an expression at once proud and forlorn. It was all she could do to keep the tears out of them, and her mouth firm and set.

“The child is tired, my dear,” interposed the vicar; “let Dolly take her up-stairs, and give us some tea as soon as possible. We are here sooner than you expected.”

Mrs Sylvestre’s only reply was to repeat her command—“Come here, Anna, I want to speak to you.”

Anna moved slowly towards her. Her gait had an ease and dignity which came perhaps

from the free life she had led, united to an admirable physical development—perhaps from the unconscious influence of the great works of art amidst which she had grown up from infancy. Not a point was lost on the woman who watched her.

“Will you kiss me?” she asked, when the girl had come close up to her, but making no advance on her own part, and with an expression in the prominent blue eyes which might have choked the readiest springs of feeling.

Anna’s springs of feeling were not ready. There was a lump in her throat which warned her not to trust her voice to speech.

Her aunt stooped towards her and pressed a light kiss upon her forehead; then, as if to compensate herself for this sacrifice to duty, she said, as she touched the rich masses of her magnificent hair—

“This will never do, Anna! We must get rid of this encumbrance at the first opportunity; no wonder your head aches and you look so pale.”

Anna started, and instinctively grasped as

much of her floating *chevelure* as her slim fingers could hold.

“Cut off my hair, do you mean !”

There was an accent in her voice that quickened the pulses of Mrs Sylvestre’s heart ;—it meant defiance and conflict.

“Cut it shorter,” she replied, quietly. “Look at your cousins ! their hair is pretty and neat, as well as fashionable ; yours would want a lady’s-maid to keep it in order, which, it is quite obvious, you have never had, nor am I able to give you. But we will talk of this another time. Dorothy, take your cousin up-stairs.”

Dorothy came timidly forward, and held out a childish dimpled hand, with a shy smile ; but Anna made no response.

“Follow Dorothy up-stairs, Anna,” said Mrs Sylvestre, sharply, “and make haste down again. Tea will be ready directly.”

Anna obeyed with evident relutance.

The bedroom into which her cousin took her was a bare meagre chamber, with two narrow white beds in it, scrupulously neat and spotless, and just as many toilet accessories as necessity

required. But the floor was covered with fresh India matting—there was a large curtainless window, but it presented the charm of a deep window-seat, and commanded a fine view of the valley and distant hills.

Anna looked about her, crossed the floor, and sitting down in the window, pulled off her hat and gloves, and then, with an odd sort of deliberation, bowed her face upon her hands and sobbed aloud.

Dorothy was greatly distressed. She had been early taught that it was disgraceful to cry, and she was very much afraid of the stranger. She crept up to Anna's side, and laid a timid hand on her arm to attract her notice.

“Don't cry, please,” she urged ; “your eyes will be red, and mamma will be vexed. I wish we were not all strange to you, Anna, but you will soon get used to us, and we do have nice times in the garden when lessons are done. Look down at the lilacs and laburnum trees. Adrian Earle said you would perhaps never have seen any.”

Dorothy's voice was like the cooing of a

wood-pigeon. Anna lifted up her tear-stained face, and looked instinctively in the direction indicated.

The delicate perfume of the flowering shrubs scented the evening air, and the golden laburnum chains fascinated her eyes. Then a blackbird suddenly broke the sylvan stillness with the clear melody of his delightful whistle, and a thrush stirred in a thick blossoming thorn-tree, and responded or outvied him with his finer notes. Lewesden and Pilsdon stood out in the blue distance, well defined against the gorgeous sunset sky, and the whole wealth of the typical English landscape lay between them and the vicarage garden.

Dorothy, whom sympathy rendered acute, pressed affectionately against her cousin's side.

"It is very pretty, isn't it?" she said, "though it is not like Florence."

Anna's breast heaved. She turned away from the window, and shut her eyes to hide the burning tears which the movement only caused to flow over her cheeks. With her hands clasped together tightly in her lap, and her graceful

head bowed with the weight of her ardent anguish, she looked like some youthful saint anticipating her martyrdom.

There was a knock at the door, and the governess announced that tea was ready.

“I will not come down,” said Anna; “send me something to eat up here.”

“Eat in your bedroom!” said Dorothy, surprised; “we are never allowed to do that.”

“Then I will do without eating. I will not go down-stairs—I like this place best.”

But when Mrs Sylvestre heard Dorothy’s report, she rose from behind her tea-urn, in spite of a smothered protest from her husband, and going into Anna’s room, took the girl by the hand in her cool strong grasp and constrained her to rise from her seat.

“Tea is ready,” she said, “and you need refreshment. Come with me, Anna; no one stays away from meals unless they are ill.”

Anna yielded, and her aunt felt somewhat mollified towards her, as having herself scored the first victory.

CHAPTER IX.

“ I think we are too ready with complaint
In this fair world of God’s.”

—E. B. BROWNING.

THE next few weeks passed with less friction than might have been expected. The novelty of her surroundings could not but occupy Anna's mind to a degree which prevented perpetual brooding over her dead father and lost freedom. Then she was kept hard at her lessons. The young governess, who had now lived with Mrs Sylvestre more than two years, was a zealous and conscientious girl, who had well profited by the advanced instruction she had received, and on whom the intelligence and progress of her little pupils reflected infinite credit.

Anna was not long in perceiving that her

own ignorance simply astounded her cousins. What did it matter that she spoke Italian with greater fluency than her native language, and could repeat whole pages of the 'Divina Commedia' by heart, when she could not write a decent letter in either tongue? She sketched with a power and ease that almost startled her new companions; but she had scarcely heard of the multiplication table; and her spelling was guided by the purest phonetic instincts. Of music she knew absolutely nothing, while able to reproduce by ear any melody she heard once played, and to sing with a voice as pure and true as the birds of the air. History, except as regarded Romanist and Florentine legends, was a fountain whose seal had never been broken,—she was absolutely ignorant of her own ignorance. Of the whole circle of human knowledge and possible attainment, she had scarcely touched a single point.

All this was pretty much what Mrs Sylvestre had expected, and for which she had prepared Miss Sewell; but the latter at least was not prepared for the profound indifference, almost

contempt, for learning which Anna Trevelyan showed.

The drudgery of arithmetic, the mental discipline which grammar exacts—even the details of geographical science—were a profound weariness to the girl, who had never yet known what it was to do the thing she was not inclined to do.

“Of what use is it?” she asked. “I do not care about it all. I know enough to make life pleasant, if only—” And then she stopped short.

“If only?” repeated Mr Sylvestre, with a sneer. It was this lady’s habit to be continually in and out of her children’s schoolroom.

Anna looked up defiantly; the flush had dried the tears from her eyes.

“If only I had some one I cared for,” she added, boldly. “None of you seem to mind about that; but I think it is the only thing that matters!”

Dorothy, who was sitting next her, managed to slip her little palm into her hand. Anna looked at her with a kind of superb tolerance.

“ You are a dear little thing,” she said ; “ but I don’t mean that sort of feeling. I mean the love one has for those older and better than we are, when we know we should make them happier by growing better and wiser ourselves.”

“ My dear Anna,” said Miss Sewell, smiling, “ you would make my heart dance with joy if you would only learn your lessons better ; and, I am sure, your aunt will say the same.”

“ No, she will not,” replied Mrs Sylvestre, drily. “ Anna must do her duty under other incentives. If, for instance, she will not take the trouble to master that chapter of Collier, which I see still open before her, she must spend the evening over it instead of going out for a walk with the rest.”

As she passed out of the room, she stopped beside her niece for a moment and lifted the heavy tresses from her neck. “ I am still of opinion this hair ought to be cut off,” she remarked ; “ you would learn much better without it. I shall consult our doctor on the subject.”

As the door closed upon her, Anna shut the

venerable volume open before her which she had been making some effort to study.

“I hate her,” she said, “and she hates me. I will not learn my lesson ! As for my hair—not a finger shall be laid upon it !”

She burst suddenly into passionate crying, as was her custom ; but it was neither wounded pride nor alarmed vanity which made her weep, but the remembrance of the last touch of her father’s hand upon the glories of her head, and his tender admiration of them.

Lessons were just over, so Miss Sewell hastily dismissed the children to the garden, hoping Anna’s rash words had escaped them, and then sat down by the girl.

“I do not for a moment suppose that it is a point your aunt will carry against your consent, so don’t cry about it. What, dear,” remarking the prompt curve of her flexible lip, “am I making some mistake ? Then I beg your pardon ; only you must not say you won’t look at that poor book any more—you could master it in half an hour if you chose—— And if you don’t choose, there will be no walk for you to-

night in Methuen Park. See, what a sunset we shall have, and the wild strawberries are ripe!"

A rapt look came over Anna's face which puzzled Miss Sewell extremely. She knew very little about Anna's past life, Mrs Sylvestre not approving of raising the best of governesses to the position of a confidant.

"Dolly told me her mother never let them walk in the Park, however hard they begged."

"That is when Sir Giles is at home," said Miss Sewell, smiling. "Mrs Sylvestre does not like to encroach on other people's privacy. He has been staying in Paris, with his nephew, almost ever since the funeral. They are expected home to-morrow."

Anna made a movement of eager speech, then closed her lips; and a flush passed over the fine pallor of her skin, which seemed like a transfiguration.

"I will go," she said. "You are right when you say I can learn my lesson if I choose."

An hour later Miss Sewell and her pupils passed through the vicarage gates on their way

to Methuen Park. It was a two miles' walk, as we know ; but the season was at the prime of its summer glories, and the children, eager to make up for the long day's close confinement by free exercise of voice and limb, ran and leapt and laughed with perpetual divergences into the teeming hedgerows in pursuit of flowers and ferns, dropped almost as soon as gathered. All at least except Anna, who, having learnt her distasteful task, was now walking at Miss Sewell's side, with pale cheeks and gleaming eyes—signs of some deep inward excitement.

Just as they had reached the gate which divided the park from the public road, a young man stepped forward and opened it from the inner side. The children looked shyly at him ; Miss Sewell thanked him, with a smile, and he, with a careless courteous recognition, singled out Dorothy alone for the honour of his greeting.

“ Well met ! ” he said. “ I was deadly tired of myself and my book.” He glanced towards a near tree, where an open volume was lying on the grass, and a horse quietly grazing with its bridle fastened by a stake to the ground. “ I

am delighted to meet a friend. May I join you, Miss Sewell?"

"If you like to do so; but the children are going to pick strawberries, and Dolly always knows best where to find them. I am afraid you won't care for that."

"I would much rather stay with Mr Earle, if he will let me," said Dolly, anxiously; but this Miss Sewell overruled. She knew the children would be expected to produce proofs of their industry, and also that Mrs Sylvestre looked very coolly upon the odd friendship between her little daughter and Sir Walter Earle's heir: had he extended it to the family it would have been another matter.

"Run on with the little ones, Dorothy, and come back when you have filled your baskets." And Dorothy, with a wistful look at the young man, who only replied to it by a careless smile, was compelled to obey.

Adrian meanwhile dropped to Miss Sewell's side, and cast a swift inquiring look towards Anna. He was very much struck by the tall, pale, picturesque-looking girl, whose air and

expression seemed involuntarily to convey the idea of aloofness and isolation. It was not to be supposed that he was in ignorance of the small politics of the locality; and falling back on the gossip which had reached him, he came to a right conclusion about Anna's identity.

“Will you not introduce me to Mrs Sylvestre's niece?” he asked.

His smile was so sweet, and manner so soft, that Anna, abstracted as she was, turned her eyes fully upon him.

“My name is Anna Trevelyan,” she said, while poor Miss Sewell was hesitating to find a way of escape out of her difficulty,—“you can tell me yours.”

This girl, without a penny, spoke and looked like some young captive princess. Adrian was still more amused and interested. He stooped to pick a particularly fine globe of clover which caught his eye in the grass, and on recovering the erect position, managed to bring himself to Anna's side.

“I am Adrian Earle,” he said; “but you will never have heard of me! Indeed very few

people have. I live a harmless, quiet life, something like a toad in a hollow tree. It is seldom I go so far afield as I have done to-day." Then, glancing at Miss Sewell, he added, "I felt a little surprise at recognising your party, and thought you must all be playing truant; how is it the veto is removed which makes Methuen Park forbidden ground?"

"That is only when Sir Giles is at home: I thought you knew our domestic code pretty well by this time, Mr Earle?"

"It is precisely because I know it so well," began Adrian, when, to his astonishment, he felt a sudden stealthy grip on his arm from Anna's thin but vigorous fingers, and meeting her eyes, read in them a mute passionate entreaty, which arrested the words on his tongue.

"Can we see the house yet?" she asked in an eager whisper. "I am so anxious to see the house!" And it seemed to him as if she wished to press forward, and leave Miss Sewell behind. Both curiosity and good feeling impelled him to humour her: there was a look of purpose in

her face which meant more than any childish whim.

They were well within the precincts of the Park by this time, which showed a prospect the young Florentine had never seen before. But Anna had no eyes for the wide stretch of vivid elastic turf, or for the gigantic boughs and massive shade of the majestic elm-trees, which were the pride of the county, as well as of the family.

The shimmer and sound of the lovely little stream which brawled at their feet, and was diverted into fountains and fish-pools in the gardens of the house, were equally disregarded by her,—all her faculties seeming to be concentrated on the discovery of the dwelling.

“We are close upon it,” said Adrian, kindly, “though it lies too low to get a view of it where we stand. A few steps higher, and you will be able to see it.”

He offered his hand to help her up the slight ascent, for in her eagerness she had stumbled and slipped, and in another moment Anna saw the venerable grey-stone mansion lying at her

feet, its old-fashioned gardens now dappled and gay with summer flowers, and the pretty Italian fountain, with its gold and silver fish in the cool basin below, leaping in the sunset light. She stood gazing at the charming picture with a breathless interest which completely puzzled her companion.

“Do you like it so much?” he asked, smiling. “It is a nice place enough in its way, and in better order just now than I ever saw it before; but that must strike you as a very small way after your Florentine palaces, Miss Trevelyan?”

Anna made an impatient movement, as if what he was saying was quite beside the point; and at the same moment Miss Sewell was called away by a sudden contention which reached her ears from her little pupils in the distance.

Anna drew a breath of relief. “Oh, how glad I am she is gone! You don’t understand, of course, but I will explain. *I know they are there*—came home yesterday—and I was dreadfully afraid Miss Sewell would find it out. If she had, she would have turned back, and gone

home again, or at least another way. You very nearly spoilt all!"

"Very nearly, indeed," he answered, "as I had not the faintest idea there was anything to spoil; but—" he hesitated from a feeling of reluctance to question closely this pale strange girl, who was giving her confidence to a stranger. He contented himself with adding—"Can I help you in any way?"

"Show me how to get down to the house," she answered. "But I see! that narrow road winds down to the little bridge, and leads into the courtyard; but where is the entrance-gate? I see no portico."

"The chief entrance is on the other side—we cannot see it where we stand; but may I venture to ask you a question?"

She nodded impatiently, still keeping her strained attention on the house below.

"Are not you Mrs Sylvestre's niece and ward? and do you not know she would be very much annoyed if you were to go inside the walls of Methuen Place? What do you want there? I ask you again, can I help you in any way?"

“What do I want?” she repeated, turning upon him a look so wild and forlorn as to be almost startling. “I want Philip Methuen! I want to tell him I cannot live with my aunt, and he must take me away. I am more miserable than I am able to say—miserable all day, miserable all the long nights through, when I lie awake wishing I were dead. I mean what I say. I wish, I wish I were lying in the warm earth, close to my father’s side, in dear old Florence! That ends all—he used to say so—but—” with a fierce strangled sob—“I am alive! and I cannot go on living as I am. Philip will help me.”

Adrian felt a pang of keenest sympathy. His knowledge of Mrs Sylvestre, and Anna’s free betrayal of her own passionate nature, made the situation quite clear to him: she must have known Methuen abroad. But he could not let this wild self-willed girl commit an absolute breach of propriety, and one for which she would probably be severely punished.

“It is very hard,” he said; “but you do not quite know how stiff and formal our English

ways are, and as there are no ladies at Methuen Place, it would be thought strange for you to call there alone. Besides, I am afraid it will only make matters worse between you and your aunt if you appeal against her authority to strangers."

"Strangers!" repeated Anna, with a smile full of passionate meaning. "I am not afraid of Mrs Sylvestre, or if I were, Philip will take care she does not hurt me. Every day I have questioned the servant about his coming home, and made her promise to tell me the truth. Without the hope of seeing him, do you think I would have endured my prison life at the vicarage? Now he is come and I am safe—Philip!"

She spoke the name with an accent so tender and caressing as to call up a smile to the young man's lips. Was she child or woman? It was difficult to pronounce exactly about her age, she looked so different from other girls, and—how beautiful she was!

But all this was for further consideration; the next thing to be done was to summon Miss

Sewell and prevent the impending catastrophe. He looked round to see how far off she was, and at the same moment one of the long windows of the dining-room of the house was thrown open, and two gentlemen stepped out upon the terrace. Quick as thought Anna recognised one of them as Philip, and scarcely less swift was her obedience to the overmastering impulse which prompted her to rush to his side.

Before Adrian could guess her intention, or prevent it, her flying feet had carried her too far for pursuit, if pursuit had been desirable. He watched her with mixed amusement and concern. So swift and sure were her movements, that the downward path was traversed, and the rustic bridge crossed, almost as fast as his eye could follow her. At this point she was close upon the courtyard of the house, and opposite the principal entrance.

Anna glanced up at the firmly closed and stately portal, and then perceived that beyond the paved enclosure only a low stone parapet divided the flower-garden, on which she had been looking down, from the park boundary.

In another moment she had sprung lightly over the barrier before the astonished eyes of Sir Giles Methuen, had rushed, flushed and panting, to Philip's side, and, perhaps because too breathless for words, had caught his hand in both hers and covered it with kisses.

After the first shock of surprise, Sir Giles formed a fair guess of the situation, and watched his nephew with an intense inward sense of amusement.

There are perhaps few things which titillate more agreeably the cynic's sense of humour, than to see a grave man placed in a ridiculous position ; and there was an obvious incongruity between the reticence of Philip's character and demeanour, and the unrestrained ardour with which this beautiful girl had all but flung herself on his breast, and was still pouring forth words of rapturous greeting in the caressing diminutives of her native Tuscan. Indeed her speech was too rapid and colloquial for the old baronet to follow, very much to his disappointment ; and he was equally baffled by his nephew's prompt and fluent response.

Philip, catching the mocking expression of his uncle's face, had felt for a moment embarrassed, but it only served to increase the air of tender respect with which he took Anna's eager hands in his, and, in response to the piteous expectancy of her face, stooped and kissed her forehead. Then leading her up to his uncle, he introduced her to him as Lewis Trevelyan's daughter, and his own little sister by adoption.

Sir Giles received her with a delightful old-fashioned courtesy. He made her sit down and rest in a comfortably padded old garden seat close to the fountain, and sent Philip back into the dining-room for a cushion for her feet and a plate of peaches. He encouraged her to talk to him freely about the matter of which her heart was full; and though a sense of gentlemanly duty prevented any expression of his personal antipathy to Mrs Sylvestre, it was evident to Anna that he was greatly in sympathy with the spirit which animated her passionate complaints.

On the other hand, Philip, having heard all

that the girl had to say, and judged it impartially, came to the conclusion that there was very insufficient ground for suspecting Mrs Sylvestre of actual injustice or cruelty, and did his best to mitigate her sense of injury. He saw clearly that, as they were respectively situated, the vicarage at Skeffington was the best asylum for Anna; and he knew her undisciplined nature well enough to be quite sure that even judicious restraint would be resented as a wrong.

He maintained this view with so much firmness, that Anna's indignation was soon diverted towards himself, and she interrupted her appeals to the more impressionable Sir Giles, with violent reproaches for his son's cruelty and faithlessness.

At this point the difficulty of the situation was increased by a servant announcing a visit from poor Miss Sewell, who had seen no other way out of her serious dilemma than braving the lion in his den, and reclaiming her pupil at the hands of the terrible old baronet himself.

Sir Giles, on receiving her name, rose and went to her immediately, and in five minutes' gracious intercourse had wiped off the accumulated aspersions and prejudices of years. Her prayer was that Sir Giles would so exercise his authority as to constrain Anna to return home with her at once: the other children she had been obliged to leave in the park under Mr Earle's kind protection.

"Oh no; ten thousand thanks! but they must not be fetched into the house." It was very late already, and she was frightened at the probable consequences of Anna's behaviour.

That the girl must go back to her aunt's house that night, Sir Giles allowed to be necessary, whatever future arrangements might be made; and he conducted Miss Sewell into the garden, that she might resume her control over her pupil.

As they approached, they saw that Anna was still sitting in her chair, weeping bitterly, with her face hidden in her hands, and that Philip, who had probably exhausted both ar-

gument and entreaty, was standing at some little distance from her in evidently perplexed, if not displeased, silence.

Sir Giles smiled to see how his face brightened at Miss Sewell's approach. "I think," he said, introducing her, "I have brought you a friend in need."

Philip looked at her for a moment with penetrating attention.

"Tell me," he asked, "the truth about Anna so far as you can without being disloyal to Mrs Sylvestre. In one word, is it necessary for her welfare and happiness that her friends should take her away?"

Miss Sewell answered with a courageous frankness which astonished herself, but which Philip's look and manner evoked.

"Mrs Sylvestre was cold, even severe, but her niece was difficult to control or win; and, on the other hand, the children were affectionate and lovable, her uncle very kind to her, and she herself deeply anxious to win the girl's love and confidence. She doubted if Anna would be better off elsewhere."

Anna had raised her head at Miss Sewell's approach, and had listened to what passed with a scornful and resentful air.

"Thank you, I am quite satisfied," Philip had answered; and then he turned towards Anna, picked up the little black silk handkerchief she had thrown off in her excitement, which had been tied round her throat, and held out his hand to raise her from her seat.

"Come," he said gently, but with an unmistakable air of authority, "we must not keep Miss Sewell waiting."

Anna rose slowly, and looked defiantly into his steady eyes.

"You send me back to prison and to misery, while you yourself have everything that heart can wish! My aunt will punish me as if I were a child when I get back. Do you know how she will punish me? She will cut off my hair!"

The inflection of the voice, the gesture with which she grasped her heavy tresses, had that touch of exaggeration which mixes something of the comic with the tragic element of a situa-

tion, and in so doing aids rather than destroys its pathos.

There was not a gleam of amusement in Philip's face.

"At least," he answered, "I will not send you back alone, but go with you; and we will both see Mrs Sylvestre, and make her understand that, under any circumstances, her displeasure must never take that form. I think I shall be able to persuade her that it was the most natural thing in the world that you should come and see your old friend; and I will do my best to get leave to pay you a visit now and then. I had made up my mind to go and see you to-morrow."

"And you will not come now? Oh, Philip, must you punish me too?"

"I will come if allowed. The sooner we go and ask the better. Are you ready, Miss Sewell?" And then in a lower tone to Sir Giles, "I have taken your permission for granted. I could scarcely leave Anna to bear the brunt of her aunt's displeasure alone."

"It seems you are likely to meet Adrian Earle in the park, playing nursery-maid to Mrs Sylvestre's brood. Send him down to me. He is always amusing, and I will keep him till you return. It is as well you and he should be friends."

CHAPTER X.

“ The truth is, youth
I want, who am old and know too much ;
I’d catch youth : lend me sight and touch !
Drop heart’s blood when life’s wheels grate dry ! ”
—R. BROWNING.

WHEN does life redeem its promises ?

Sir Giles Methuen had said to himself over and over again, that were relief possible from the miserable anxieties which had racked his peace and made the future formidable, he should be restored to health both of body and mind. Under his sharp and cynical temper he had a warm heart, which had received a good many severe shocks in his passage through life, and now in this halcyon season, so unexpectedly granted, he was quite prepared to receive his nephew with almost paternal regard.

It must, however, at the same time be

allowed that he was not only affectionate but exacting, with a morbid tendency to doubt his own capacity for being loved. He was fully prepared to adopt Philip as a son, but was the young man disposed to look upon him as a father? Was there not, under the surface of his considerate kindness and obedience, a current of determination and independence which fretted his sense of security?

To go back a little. When Sir Giles had joined Philip in Paris, he had been quite prepared to encounter even passionate protests and reproaches for the part he had played, and was not so much relieved as baffled by his nephew's studious avoidance of all controversy.

His dutiful attentions to himself, and the apparent absence of temper or resentment, did not deceive his acute observation, and at last he rushed into the subject.

They had taken the train to Fontainebleau, and were sitting under the shade of some of the prodigious oaks in that most picturesque of forests, watching the decline of the mid-summer sun, when Sir Giles said suddenly—

“Apropos of nothing, Philip, I would much rather you made a clean breast of your feelings in regard to our good Archbishop’s decision—that is, I should like to know exactly how much you were vexed and disappointed. I remember how sure you felt of the result, and am willing to own that you accept your hard fate better than I expected.”

“That is just it. I do accept it, so to my mind there is nothing more to be said.”

He looked straight before him, as if watching the delicious play of light and shade in the sylvan alleys which stretched on all sides of them, but resolutely avoiding the old man’s wistful gaze.

“So I shall never be bothered by complaint or regret in the future? or perhaps you are already persuaded there is nothing to regret?”

Philip was silent for several minutes. His gaze was still fixed, but it was easy to see the concentration was inward rather than outward; while the deepening curves of the subtle but finely moulded lips, and of the lines of the

sharply defined brows, testified that apathy at least had nothing to do with his composure.

“Don’t you remember,” he answered at last, “how freely I expressed myself on this subject when there was yet a chance of influencing your mind? My opinions, my feelings if you like, are precisely the same now as they were then, but no good can come of talking about them. I said I would yield implicit obedience to the decision reached by Monseigneur d’Enghien, not knowing that it was a foregone conclusion. Excuse my saying I look upon this as having been a trap set for my inexperience, but the unwary must suffer for their unwariness.”

“Commend me to a saint for a special gift of provocation!” cried Sir Giles, testily. “You would give me to understand that, though you bear no malice, this little transaction at starting will be an effectual barrier between us! I was fool enough to think that you and I might have stood in some measure in the relation of father and son, outside the range of pounds, shillings, and acres.”

“No father shall be able to reckon more surely upon a son’s duty.”

“Duty? Ay, I might have known all natural spontaneity would be kneaded into that nauseous stuff with you! I decline the tribute of your duty! *Duty* I can get by paying for it, and I won’t accept it at your hands. I see I have still a crook in my lot, the only difference being that the twist is in the reverse direction. Come, it is time to be going.”

He stood up impatiently as he spoke, poking the ground viciously with his stick.

“It will be quite as well,” he added, bitterly, “that you and I should not live always together. Your confounded coolness aggravates my temper, and I put myself at a disadvantage with a youngster. Am I to understand that you will take your quiet revenge by throwing away the splendid chances I am able to offer you?”

“Understand nothing but that your way is mine for the future.”

“So far good,” answered Sir Giles, a little mollified; “but I may as well warn you. No Methuen for many generations past has been a

happy or successful man. It may be you will spoil your life somehow, like the rest of us."

"Very likely. I am not at all sanguine about the future."

"But I am!" responded Sir Giles with illogical asperity. "To-morrow night—you have not forgotten, I suppose?—we are to meet Lord Sainsbury at the Embassy, and my heart is fixed on his offering you the post of his private secretary. If he should, it is understood between us that you accept it. It is the finest possible opening for a political career, which I am bent on your following. You will not disappoint me, Philip?"

"If I do," was the answer, "it will be my misfortune, not my fault."

"Once more, good. You are prepared to try, and the first step is to please the great man—I think he has every disposition to be pleased. I need not caution you against putting yourself too forward: wait to have your opinions elicited, and receive his as if they were final. If you are quite of another mind, it is not absolutely necessary that you should let the fact appear.

Time and society will make wonderful changes in your present beliefs."

"But on some very fundamental points I find Lord Sainsbury's beliefs and mine are identical."

"Eh? You are already acquainted with his opinions?"

"I have taken up Hansard the last few mornings and have been looking over his speeches. If he should only like me half as well as I like him—that is, if his words are to be trusted——"

"Come, this really looks healthy! He is a fine fellow, though a bit of a bigot; but you are of the right stuff of which disciples are made. You would never take the initiative, Philip, but docility is a far more serviceable quality. I consider the first step gained already."

Sir Giles was radiant, and still more elated when, at the close of the next day's momentous entertainment, the good-natured ambassador made opportunity to tell him before he left that Lord Sainsbury was much taken by Philip,

and that he was sure of the appointment if he would make up his mind to accept it.

“In short, Sir Giles,” he concluded, “your nephew strikes us both as specially trained to suit Lord Sainsbury’s purpose. He has not only the necessary acquirements to a degree few young men of his age possess, but I can see he has the rare gift of obeying orders. Then, again, he has the looks and manners which are indispensable to a man of Sainsbury’s fastidiousness. Tell him from me his career is already made, only—he must marry the right woman !”

“It will not be necessary for him to do that just at present. He was, as I told you, brought up for the priesthood, and the notion of marriage is disagreeable to him.”

The ambassador raised his eyebrows a little.

“That goes for what it is worth ! At all events, don’t let him fall in love with the wrong one.” And they shook hands and parted.

CHAPTER XI.

“ How the world is made for each of us !
How all we perceive and know in it
Tends to some moment’s product thus,
When a soul declares itself—to wit,
By its fruit, the thing it does ! ”

—R. BROWNING.

SIR GILES began to take heart of grace again. The nephew whom he had feared might be recalcitrant was amenable enough so far as outward submission went. He had consented to forego what he considered his vocation, and to adopt a profession for which he had professed a positive repugnance. Let sleeping dogs lie ! Was it of any great account if, at the bottom of his heart, lay the same inclinations and aversions still ?

They came home to Methuen Place under the arrangement that Philip was to consider himself his own master until Parliament met again in

the spring, the present session having nearly run its course. Lord Sainsbury, who knew all the family circumstances, had been reluctant to deprive the old man at once of his nephew's society, and had also suggested that the interval might be well spent by him in the study of English politics and constitutional history,—subjects which had been undeniably neglected in the young man's education.

Philip Methuen, to whom stringent mental occupation was a necessity as well as a duty, followed this advice so sedulously, that Sir Giles began to look about for salutary diversions for him.

There were Adrian Earle and the Earlescourt circle at command, but the young man himself was so uncertain and crochety, that he placed very little reliance on this resource, and was agreeably disappointed when he found that he and his equally difficult nephew seemed to get on very well together. Sir Giles would have said there was scarcely a sympathy in common between the learned young recluse of Issy and St Sulpice and the indolent eccentric

Englishman who had just finished his terms at Brazenose, where, to the vexation of friends who knew his powers, he had barely secured his degree, refusing to attempt to win the honours which were certainly within his easy reach.

Their friendship, however, prospered so far, that Adrian was constantly at Methuen Place ; and on the return of Sir Walter Earle from town with other members of his family, Philip accepted a fortnight's invitation to Earlescourt, Sir Giles consenting to break his habits of seclusion and join the party for the last two days of his visit.

“ By that time,” he said to his nephew, “ you and Honour Aylmer will probably be sworn friends. She is a fine girl, and every one likes her ; moreover, you will see her to advantage as mistress of the house,—poor Miss Earle being kept in town through the illness of some very dear relative. Of course you know that Miss Aylmer is an heiress in her own right, with lacs of rupees for her portion,—her father having been the governor of some obscure but prolific

Indian province. Also you know she is engaged to marry Adrian Earle as soon as she is of age. Of course he has talked to you about her?"

"He has told me about as much as you have just now said."

"There is another member of the family who will not probably make friends with you so easily—he is a miserable creature! I often pity Sir Walter Earle. It is a terrible trial to be the father of deformity, be it physical or moral."

"And what of the miserable creature's own share of the trial? Is not that sharper still?"

"I never took kindly to idiots or cripples," returned Sir Giles sharply, "and when they are spiteful and ill-conditioned, I consider myself excused from pitying them even."

Philip Methuen's acquaintance with the member of Sir Walter Earle's family thus characterised by his uncle, took place sooner than he expected.

On the day of his arrival, Sir Walter and Honour Aylmer were not at home to receive him, for no particular hour had been fixed, and

the servant who admitted him, labouring under some mistake, said that Mr Earle was in his brother's room, and had desired that if Mr Methuen came he should be asked to join them there.

Having taken him to the door of the apartment, the man knocked and retired; and Philip, in answer to a shrill "Come in!" opened it and entered. It was a chilly day in early August, but the temperature of the room was that of a hothouse, and lying on a pile of cushions, in the full focus of the blazing hearth, with his head receiving the direct rays of the fire, lay the blighted cadet of the house, the deformed cripple, Oliver Earle. The deformity was not apparent as he lay with a covering over his limbs; but the sharp features and eager wistful expression of the boy, who was seventeen but looked younger, told the unmistakable tale of lifelong and unaccepted suffering. His position was such that he faced the door, and, on seeing a stranger enter, he uttered a sudden cry like a hurt animal, and drew the silken coverlet up to his eyes.

“ Go away ! ” he almost shrieked. “ You have made some mistake. Go away this moment ! How dare you stare at me ? ”

His eyes blazed as he spoke : one might have thought he was some couchant creature about to spring on the intruder.

Philip closed the door softly behind him, and advanced a little farther into the room.

“ It is true,” he said, “ I have made a mistake. I expected to find Adrian Earle here, but I believe you are his brother. If so, why don’t you give me the welcome I have missed from him ? ”

He looked down at him quietly, without curiosity and without pity, and his voice had an inflection which could scarcely fail to touch the sensitive ear and heart.

“ Let me stay,” he added ; “ every one else is out, and I am quite a stranger.”

Oliver remained silent, looking hard at him, then said moodily, “ Stay if you like,” and turned, though the effort was painful, on his other side, so as to have his back to the newcomer.

Philip surveyed the room. "You are lodged like a prince," he said. "Have I your leave to examine the things lying about?" There was an inarticulate sound for answer.

It was a large apartment, with a bay-window so deep and wide that the recess formed a little chamber of itself, and the broad seat below, from which a delightful view of the pleasure-grounds could be gained, was stuffed and padded so as to form a luxurious couch. All the other couches and seats which stood about the room seemed each to have been made with some special adaptation to an invalid's comfort, and had that variety of little tables in convenient neighbourhood, which is one of the happiest departures of modern taste. Book-cases full of costly volumes, and cabinets fresh from the hands of Reisener and Gouthière, and stuffed with curiosities from all parts of the world, looked to superb advantage against a wall hung with modern tapestry that might almost have vied with the products of Indian looms in quaintness of design and harmony of colour. The draperies of the windows, and the

wide curtain which hung before the door, as well as the covers of chairs and sofas, were of the same fabric, duly subordinated in tint and pattern ; and refinement was added to luxury by the water - colour pictures on the dividing panels of the wall, and by the fantastic *jardinières*, full of sweet-smelling flowers and exotic ferns.

Philip deliberately inspected the drawings and elaborate *bric-a-brac* on all sides, partly with an interest which came from lifelong acquaintance with art under all its forms, and partly in order to reassure the shrinking and unfriendly little figure moving restlessly beneath its covering.

There was a half-done painting on an easel in one corner, with all the artist's litter strewn about, as if the work had been suddenly interrupted ; and one of Collard's small grand pianos stood open, with a book of Chopin's waltzes on the desk. On a table, larger and more serviceable than the rest, was heaped a pile of lesson-books, amongst which he distinguished a beautiful copy of the 'Iliad,' and another of the

‘Divina Commedia,’ the margin of which was covered with pencil-notes.

He took up the latter instinctively, saying, with a smile, “It is pleasant to recognise old friends;” and then, as he stood, began to read the words aloud at which the book stood open:—

“Li ruscelletti, che de’ verdi colli
Del Casentin discondon guiso in Arno,
Facendo i lor canali e freddi e molli.”

The boy listened intently, then said moodily, “Honour does not read like that.”

“Then so much the worse for Honour!” said a fresh young voice; and Miss Aylmer, still in her riding-habit, and with her soft felt hat shading her sweet face, stood smiling in the issue of the open door, the heavy curtain of which she upheld with her raised arm, making a charming picture. Philip dropped the book in his movement of surprise; he had not heard the door open.

“I am afraid you have not been well treated, Mr Methuen,” she added, coming forward with the free firm step and graceful bearing which

are distinguishing characteristics of the well-born, fine-natured English girl. "Sir Walter did not expect you so soon, and Adrian set out to meet you hours ago, and must have missed you, as we warned him he would. I am so glad Oliver has been friendly!"

Her voice took a sweeter tone as she pronounced the name, and the animation of her face softened when she looked at him.

"I have not been friendly! He had no business to come in here, but I don't mind so much now. Make haste and take off your things; I thought you were never coming home!"

She promised and left the room, reflecting that though the stranger had shown neither awkwardness nor embarrassment, he had scarcely spoken, and repeating to herself, with a touch of humour on her lips as she recalled Oliver's objection to the perfect enunciation—

"Li ruscelletti, che de' verdi colli."

Shall we look at her for a moment as she stands in her thick white gown before the glass, waiting while her maid ties the soft myrtle-coloured

sash round a waist slim with the bewitching slimness of girlhood, but exhibiting the curves of nature, not the false roundness of the milliner's ideal? She is tall for a woman—too tall, her female friends are apt to say; but this defect, if it be one, can well be borne when allied to perfect symmetry and the elasticity of vigorous health, and sustained by the port almost of a goddess. Many faces might be more strictly beautiful, perhaps, but her complexion was touched with the finest tints a brunette can desire. Truth and honour sat on her brows; humour and sweetness in charming wedlock lurked in the corners and moulded the lines of the beautiful lips; and never did a less selfish and more loyal heart beat than that which throbbed in Honour Aylmer's bosom, and lighted the tender passion of her face.

When she came back to Oliver's room—and leaning over the boy to resettle his pillows, showed in every look and tone an almost maternal kindness—Philip Methuen watched her with a close observation of which he was scarcely himself conscious.

She seemed to him the verification of some vague ideal which, until he saw her, he did not know he had ever conceived.

“I have been talking to Philip Methuen a little,” said Oliver, with that spice of spitefulness which comes of such experiences as his, “and he does not like Chopin at all, and thinks your picture badly done.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Honour, almost with an accent of pain. “I daresay such a critic as Mr Methuen may think my picture bad; but Chopin!”

Philip looked at her and smiled with that impersonal air which gave at once an individuality and a distinction to his manners, as the absence of eagerness and self-assertion invariably do.

“That I do not like Chopin is quite true, Miss Aylmer; but you will scarcely believe that I had the impertinence to condemn your painting?”

“But you said,” shrilled Oliver, lifting himself a little on one elbow in order to look into his face,—“you said—what was it you said?—

that the composition was contradictory. In a good picture, of course, the composition is not contradictory!"

Honour blushed a little. "I am afraid that I must agree with Oliver, that you meant that it was bad, if that was what you said; but I am quite prepared to prove that I think your criticism worth listening to."

She turned and went towards the easel, Philip following her.

It was a landscape, representing sunrise over some eastern clime, and although unfinished, was, so far as it went, a more than commonly good specimen of amateur work.

"I flattered myself it was clever," said Honour with a sigh.

"It is clever," replied Philip; "and when you draw from nature your work must be very good indeed."

"And how do you know this is not drawn from nature? Many girls have travelled in Africa."

"Then if you have, Miss Aylmer, you must have painted this after your return. To speak

like a pedant, the fauna and flora are not in keeping—not possible, in fact. Such trees do not grow side by side, and those animals, spirited as they are, do not live in the same latitudes."

"Ah, that comes from drawing in blind confidence upon an ill-educated fancy! I see you have not the least idea of the subject of my picture—it is the Happy Valley of Rasselas—and I took infinite pains to gather together in one every notion which Oliver or I could evolve of Abyssinian glory and beauty."

"Those are the ventures which only amateurs have the courage to make; but the talent which is a little astray here is quite enough to fit you for the legitimate exercise of art to a degree few of your age—I need not speak of sex—could hope to reach. You have a great gift."

"Never was the *amende honorable* more generously made!"

"You are mistaken in saying that—I am so little a man of the world, that I always mean what I say."

They were interrupted by a fretful voice from the rug.

“There, there! that sort of talk worries me dreadfully. I want you to play something, Honour. I am all wrong to-day. I should like what he dislikes.”

“You will not mind?” she asked, smiling. And sitting down at once to the piano, began to play one of Chopin’s most subtle and intricate waltzes with admirable expression and skill, Oliver following every phrase with eager nervous fingers.

While she was playing, Adrian opened the door and came in. He looked pale and tired, but his face brightened on seeing Philip. At the same time he made a sign to keep silence, and sinking down on the couch nearest to him, was presently as much absorbed as his brother in the music.

As Honour rose and turned round to speak to him, he said—

“Don’t ask me any questions, you know my abhorrence of the note interrogative! I have missed my man, and tired myself to death, but

I am all right now. Sit down and go on again, —you seem to play better than ever, and do credit to the lessons in town. When Chopin is rendered by such fingers as yours, I am in heaven!"

"Then it must certainly be the heaven of Mohamet," said Philip.

"What!" cried Adrian, "is there an *Index Expurgatorius* for musicians as well as writers? What is wrong with Chopin?"

"To my mind he is of the earth earthy, weaving his spells out of the lower elements of human nature, and therefore false to the end and aim of true art."

"Ah," returned Adrian with his delicate smile, "you are too much in advance of us! So far as Chopin goes, we three are in the first stage of innocence, unable to discern the evil from the good. There are subtleties of intuition imbibed at St Sulpice which leave Oxford far behind."

Philip coloured. "You must not believe that all I say and do is derived from St Sulpice; nor that it is a cloister, as you seem to imagine.

Besides, I have gone occasionally into society, both in Paris and Florence."

"We have no difficulty in believing that; and you deceive yourself prodigiously, my good fellow, if you fancy that your personality is strongly suggestive of the cloister. You are an enigma which Honour and Oliver will help me to solve. By the way, I am so glad you have got over your first introduction to my brother."

"I am afraid that it arose from a mistake, and that he has not forgiven me."

"It was a mistake," said the boy; "but I am not sorry now. I think I shall be able to get on with you—you did not stab me with your pity. And you told Honour her picture was wrong."

"And that is a claim upon your gratitude when Miss Aylmer is so good to you!"

"It is a claim upon my confidence; every one else tells her she is perfect."

"And so she is," said Adrian, looking at her tenderly. "I should have to reflect all night to discover a fault in Honour."

At that moment the girl's name was called in the hearty ringing voice of the master of the house. She rose eagerly to obey the summons.

As she passed Adrian, she whispered, "Spare me to Mr Methuen! He may be of Oliver's temper, and hate what is overpraised."

When she was gone, Adrian rose and stretched himself wearily.

"I am over-tired," he explained. "Why does a man walk who has a horse in the stable? I expected to meet you half-way or nearer, and positively got as far as Skeffington. Then it occurred to me to call at the vicarage, where I had the good luck to find Mrs Sylvestre out, and the children swinging in the orchard."

"And you stayed to swing them?"

"Pardon me. That would be an effort quite out of my line. They swung one another, and I walked about under the trees with Anna Trevelyan. Tell me, if you don't mind, all about her—in regard to yourself."

"There is very little to tell," said Philip coldly. "I was the friend of her father, and

have known her from a child. Mr Trevelyan was Mrs Sylvestre's brother."

"But she talks about you as if you had been the good genius of the family, and her own peculiar God Almighty. There is nothing like you in heaven or earth."

Philip coloured with vexation. "Why did you encourage her to talk at random? The explanation is, she is ardent and impressionable, and has few friends." Then another thought struck him. "I think you are often at the vicarage, where my visits are almost forbidden, and I am deeply anxious about Anna. It has occurred to me, since I have seen Miss Aylmer, what a help and safeguard her notice and friendship would be. Could it be managed? Would there be difficulty or objection on any side?"

Adrian's face lighted up.

"There would be Mrs Sylvestre's standing objection to anything that made life pleasanter, but we will try and get over that. It is an excellent idea! Honour will be sure to take kindly to such a singular girl, and I have a

constitutional, inclusive passion for beautiful children, though I see you scarcely reckon Anna Trevelyan under that head. We will brace her with Dorothy, and persuade Mrs Sylvestre to let them both come to Earlescourt together. Then we will introduce her to Oliver."

"You will introduce no girl to me," said the boy doggedly. "And now, please, both of you go away. I am weary to death of lying here, and want to get back to my couch. Don't wait! I have my stick close beside me. I hate to be helped or watched."

CHAPTER XII.

“ How sweet I roamed from field to field,
And tasted all the summer’s pride,
Till I the Prince of Love beheld,
Who in the sunny beams did glide.

With sweet May-dews my wings were wet,
And Phœbus fired my vocal rage;
He caught me in his silken net
And shut me in his golden cage.”

—BLAKE.

THE fortnight which Philip Methuen was to spend at Earlescourt lengthened itself to a month. There was not a member of the charming household who did not find some special attraction in the grave, gifted, unselfish young fellow, who, in his turn, felt himself surrounded by an atmosphere so healthy and genial as to be in itself a new sensation.

Sir Walter Earle, himself one of the members for the county and an ardent partisan, discussed politics with him at every convenient oppor-

tunity, with a view, as he said, of impressing on the blank paper of his mind the proper ideas and opinions for his future guidance, also undertaking at the same time to direct the channels into which his historical researches should flow.

So strong were the baronet's personal convictions, that he did not stop to doubt whether the principles he enunciated and maintained so vigorously, were received with due submission by the pupil whose intelligence was so prompt, and whose patience was so invincible.

Philip had been trained to silence and docility; but they erred greatly who supposed that he was prepared to sacrifice any portion, however small, of his individual judgment and freedom. Religion might have demanded such sacrifices, and from her recognised and austere demands there was nothing he would have wished to hold back; but his path had been diverted, and as regarded society and the world at large, he reserved to himself perfect liberty of thought and action. Only until his knowledge was riper, or the necessity for some decision arose, there was no need to talk about himself.

Adrian in his turn availed himself of his new friend's rare capacity for quiet sympathetic listening.

"I can tell you my complaint," he said to him, "in very few words. I was either born without the faculty of enjoyment, or I lost it when I grew too old for almond-toffy. There is nothing under the sun I care about. I have no call to work for money or position—they will come in due time without my earning them. I think college honours not worth winning, and politics a bore, besides being more or less a dirty game. I never carry a gun, it is too much fag ; and I don't care to see the high-flyers spin and fall. I have had some hot schoolboy friendships ; but when you have walked over a fellow's mind, that kind of thing grows tame ; and I shall always be afraid to marry, lest the same thing should happen with my wife."

Philip coloured. "It is a breach of honour to say that when I know who your wife is to be!"

Adrian raised his eyebrows. "Is it ? You are too squeamish, though I should be loath to fail in any point of observance to the dearest

girl in the world. Heigh-ho ! I wish my life had not been cut out for me ! I shall be driven to look to Anna Trevelyan for a diversion. Dolly is a dear little bit of soft stuff, with a pretty taste in fairy tales ; but a measure of resistance is indispensable."

" But I thought you were a passionate reader ? "

" I have been, but am one no longer. I took my youthful fevers so severely that they weakened my system. I was a drivelling idiot over Byron—not his poetry, but the man and his life : his " cry stormily sweet, his Titan agony," reached the marrow of my bones. I would have made a pilgrimage—ay, with peas in my shoes—to any person or place where I could have learnt something more about him than I knew—and I knew every line which has ever been written about him. Have you any sympathy with a craze of that kind ? "

" I can quite understand it ; but have you walked over the length and breadth of Byron's mind ? "

" You are mocking, I perceive ; but none the

less I answer ‘Yes’ boldly, and will add that of almost every other English poet also, except, of course, Browning, who has still left me some hard nuts to crack. But—on second thoughts we will have no more *buts*— Let us go and look up Honour—no doubt she is shut in with Oliver—and persuade her to go with us to Skeffington and make friends with Mrs Sylvestre.”

Philip made no objection, and they found her, as Adrian expected, playing her usual part in the boy’s room. She held a book in her hand, from which she had been reading aloud. Oliver protested angrily against his brother’s interruption.

“ She is reading ‘Sohrab and Rustum,’ ” he cried, “ and we have just got to the fight, and must go on. Adrian, I hate you ! Who cares for that trumpery girl, Anna Trevelyan ; and I don’t want Honour to go away half the day. We are going to make a picture out of the story ! ”

Honour laughed and blushed. “ I wish you would not betray all our little secrets, Oliver ; Mr Methuen will think me more presumptuous than ever.”

Philip had taken up the open book she had put down, and his attention was so fixed upon the page that he did not hear her.

Oliver looked at him with a pleased smile on his eager face.

“ You like it! you like it!” he cried, in his shrill tones; “ I see you do. Very well; let Adrian and Honour go, and you shall read to me.”

He spoke like some Eastern despot appointing his grand vizier.

“ Who wrote ‘Sohrab and Rustum,’ Miss Aylmer?” asked Philip. “ I know you read Homer—this is Homeric!”

He read a few lines aloud. The fire of an intense enthusiasm lighted up his face as he spoke. The girl with her keen artist’s perceptions thrilled a little.

“ It is fine,” said Adrian, simply, as if his words set the seal; “ I don’t think even Tennyson at his best has gone beyond the power and pathos of the death-scene.”

Philip was still reading. He carried the book to the window, and stood absorbed for a little time. As he put it down, he said—

“Tennyson, did you say? No doubt you know Tennyson much better than I, but at least no page of his which tells a story has come under my eyes comparable to this. This is large, heroic, simple, like Nature or Fate. Tennyson elaborates with the craft of a *virtuoso*. Let me take your place, Miss Aylmer, after luncheon. It will be a pleasure to me to read this all through and over again, and it is perfect weather for a long walk. You look pale.”

“Oliver is a selfish little brute,” said Adrian, languidly, “and must learn to do with less of Honour. It is an infamy! I declare you are looking quite fagged. Walking is out of the question—we will ride together.”

“You and I?” asked Honour. “Oliver is not selfish—he won’t mind being left alone for an hour or two, and Mr Methuen at least should get the benefit of the weather he thinks so perfect. I know he and Sir Walter were shut up for hours in the library this morning.”

“My father never knows how time passes when he is riding his political hobby, but I guess that Methuen does. We want you to call

on Mrs Sylvestre, Honour, and make a conquest of her goodwill. Both Philip and I think to know you would do Anna Trevelyan a world of good, so we are to persuade her aunt to let her come and see us, and bring sweet little Dolly in her train. You will be quite willing?"

"I shall be quite willing; but one word from Mr Methuen himself would surely go further than all you or I could say—wouldn't it?"

She looked a little wistfully at Philip, who had taken up his book again.

"On the contrary, my interference would lead to a summary refusal. Mrs Sylvestre is a selfish worldly woman, who will be quick to see the advantages of her daughter and niece being on visiting terms at Earlescourt. I see them too, so clearly, on other grounds, that I am bold enough, as poor Anna's friend, to beg you to make her the offer of your friendship. I can think of nothing so likely to help her as to know you, Miss Aylmer."

He spoke so simply that Honour took herself to task because she felt her cheek flush and heart beat; but she inwardly resolved that no

powers of persuasion with which she might be gifted should lie dormant that afternoon.

Afternoon visitors were not numerous at Skeffington Vicarage, so that Mrs Sylvestre felt a little disconcerted when Janet brought her Honour's card. Although the rack would not have forced the admission from her lips, she was profoundly flattered by the attention.

Adrian Earle counted for nothing when he came in his meaningless way to see Dolly, bringing her books which she would have been better without reading, or presents much too costly for a little girl. But a visit from Miss Aylmer, a young lady of fortune in her own right, and the future mistress of Earlescourt also, whose name was as a sweet odour through the whole district—this did count. Her notice would be worth having for her girls.

It was not often that Mrs Sylvestre, scrupulously neat in her person, kept a guest waiting; but on the day in question, in keeping with the usual contrariety of things, she was still wearing her morning gown, having planned to

pick strawberries for preserving, in the cool of the evening, with her children and governess; and consequently Adrian and Honour had not only full time to exhaust the poor resources of the colourless room, but to grow a little impatient before she entered.

Adrian was astonished and amused at Mrs Sylvestre's pleasant accost. He would have said it was not in her power to be so gracious; but when he glanced at Honour's sweet face and noble winning air, he allowed that it was simply impossible for any one to resist her.

Honour was explaining that, ever since Adrian had made Dolly's acquaintance, she had been anxious to know her too, thinking if Oliver could be induced to make friends with her, it would do him so much good.

“There is nothing we all deplore more,” she said, “than his nervous dread of strangers, and the influence of a sweet little girl like Dolly might be of inestimable advantage. Will you be good enough to let us try?”

“Dolly is very shy,” was the answer, “and would be more afraid of Mr Oliver than he of her.”

At this moment the door was abruptly opened, and Anna entered, holding a book in her hand.

“I know it!” she said sullenly. “Miss Sewell said I was to bring it to you.”

She advanced scarcely within the threshold of the door, and spoke without lifting her eyes, so that a moment or two elapsed before she discovered that Mrs Sylvestre was not alone.

Whatever irritation that lady felt at so ill-timed an interruption, she restrained the manifestation of the feeling, conscious that she could not do otherwise in face of Adrian’s courteous recognition (which he took care should not be too friendly), and Miss Aylmer’s kind desire to be made known to the stranger. Almost before she was aware to what she was committing herself, she had yielded to Honour’s gentle pressure, and had consented that Anna should bear Dolly company for a few days’ visit at Earlescourt. She was probably the less reluctant because Anna’s indifference was obvious; her notice of Adrian and his companion was of the slightest,—her whole air and manner show-

ing what her aunt characterised as “insufferable effrontery.”

She was summarily dismissed to summon the more gentle Dolly, with the intimation that she herself need not return.

“My niece, Miss Aylmer, has been a source of profound anxiety ever since I undertook the charge of her, but she is more unmanageable than ever since I found it my duty to put a stop to her intercourse with young Mr Methuen.”

Although anticipating the nature of the answer, Honour asked simply—“Was it really a duty?”

“To preserve her from becoming a pervert to Romanism? My dear Miss Aylmer, we are absolutely responsible for the souls we have in our keeping; and consider also my position in the parish! If a young person under the vicar’s guardianship turned Papist, it would be an indelible disgrace to the family.”

“But had you reason to think Mr Methuen would have used his influence in that way?”

Mrs Sylvestre smiled significantly. “He

could not help himself! Did a Jesuit priest ever forego the chance of making a pervert, or of denying the intention of so doing, when it suited his purpose?"

Adrian could scarcely contain his patience, even under the eager touch of Honour's restraining hand, who welcomed the entrance of Dolly as a fortunate diversion. To the young man's affectionate inquiry if she would not like to come and see him at home, Dolly answered with a deep blush, and an anxious reference to her mother's face, "That there was nothing in the world she would like so much."

So with this auspicious issue of her embassy, Honour rose, saying that she herself would drive over to fetch the children to-morrow.

CHAPTER XIII.

“ What are we set on earth for ? Say, to toil ;
Nor seek to leave thy tending of the vines
For all the heat o’ the day. . . .
God did anoint thee with His odorous oil
To wrestle, not to reign.”

—E. B. BROWNING.

THERE are certain crises in our lives when we pause and find ourselves astray—off the track we had striven to keep—face to face with the things we have feared and hated—cut away from the hopes and possible chances which would have made us good men or happy women. And then we look round eagerly for the fetish on which to vent our despair : we will not arraign Providence, for we have relinquished that belief, nor Fate, for it is pagan ; but we pour forth the acid of our self-contempt on the short-sightedness of human prescience, the weakness which is mastered by the relentless force of circumstance.

“Had we but known!” is a wail eloquent with human defeat.

As Honour Aylmer’s charming little pony-phaeton bowled down the avenue of over-arching beeches on its homeward way to cheery Earlescourt, in the riotous glamour of the August sunshine, her own generous heart all aglow with interest and sympathy for the pale, large-eyed, silent girl who sat beside her, how little she guessed that she was weaving with her own hands the warp and woof of her untoward destiny, and introducing into the harmony of her life the note of discord that was to jangle all its sweetness.

As they drew up before the fine façade of the house, Honour saw with what grave scrutiny Anna appeared to take note of it, and at the same moment Adrian ran down the stately flight of steps which led to the entrance-hall, to assist them out of the carriage.

“My sweet little Dolly, you look like Titania herself in that white frock. Welcome to Earlescourt! We are going to have a good time together. Miss Trevelyan, I see you are tak-

ing the measure of my ancestral home? Does it please you almost as well as Methuen Place?"

"It is bigger," said Anna coldly. She looked eagerly about her with a wistful expression in her eyes, almost piteous in its intensity. Adrian felt a movement of annoyance.

"Shall I show you the gardens before we go into the house? Do you think, Honour, we may make a raid on the peaches? I want the children to have sweet recollections of Earlescourt?"

He met Anna's direct level glance, touched with an expression of careless scorn. She walked past him and entered the house with Honour, while Adrian, bound by his promise, led Dorothy off in the direction of the hothouses.

As the two girls crossed the hall, Honour, moved by a sudden impulse, stood still for a moment and kissed Anna.

"I want you to be very happy here," she said; "to forget the troubles you have at home, or, better still, to tell me all about them. I

want you to be fond of me, Anna. I have no very dear girl friend."

"Don't!" cried Anna, in a sharp voice of pain. "I can bear anything better than kindness—it kills me!"

She threw up her head with a defiant movement, trying to conquer the sobs that rose in her throat, and Honour thought she had never seen misery more intense than gleamed in the dark depths of her eyes.

"I am not good," the girl went on. "It is no pleasure to me to see other people happy; they always seem to me to have stolen my share. A place like this, full of all that heart can wish—beautiful things, kind people who love one another—makes me feel dreadfully how empty and cruel the world is for me. Why am I so poor and you so rich? Why was the little I wanted taken away, and you have got everything—*everything*? What good will a few days' rest do me, when I must go back into slavery? Do you understand?"

"I think I do," said Honour gravely; "but we must talk all this over another time, and

it shall not be our fault if Earlescourt in the future shall not be able to brighten Skeffington. Come, I will take you up-stairs to your room myself, and we will have some tea together. We do not dine till eight."

"Will Philip Methuen be here by that time?"

Honour coloured. "I did not know you knew he was here, and am not quite sure it is right for you to meet under Mrs Sylvestre's objections."

"I always know where he is," was Anna's answer; "and if I had not found him here, I should have gone to his own house to see him." Then after a pause, she added—leaning back against the balusters and looking intently at Honour—"It is of no use for any one to try to separate me from Philip Methuen. He is my one friend till I die, or he. He made me what I am,—I mean, I should even be worse than I am had it not been for him. When he first came to see us, seven years ago, I could neither read nor write. He taught me from the first miserable beginnings, and persuaded my father

to go on teaching me when he went away. My father always seemed to think it did not matter how ignorant a woman was. I did not mind a bit either, but no child ever worked harder in its blundering way than I : and Philip said I had great talents, and got on wonderfully fast. I have not great talents," said the girl solemnly ; " he is mistaken there, but I would have cut off my right hand to please him."

She moved forward as she said the last words, and followed Honour into the room.

" It seems strange all this is for me," she went on, looking round upon its dainty elegance with discriminating eyes ; " but it is not such things that I crave after—not pretty clothes even," glancing at Honour.

She sat down in a low chair and leaned her head on her hand.

" But my sweet Anna," cried Honour, kneeling down beside her, " be reasonable ! Even were your aunt different, even did you live here, you could not be always with your friend Philip. It is hard upon women that such friendships never seem practicable for them. Besides, he

is not going to stop here in the country with womenkind and the growing crops—he is to be a great man in the great world of London."

"But I shall see him to-night?"

"Yes; we expect him back in time for dinner. He is spending the day with his uncle, and after dinner, if you like, no one shall speak to him but you."

It was almost the first experience Anna had had of the amenities of social life. The routine, completeness, and ease of the domestic arrangements struck her as unexampled luxury; and the ordinary appointments of the rooms and service produced the effect upon her mind of an Arabian Night's entertainment.

Philip only came into the drawing-room just as the gong sounded for dinner; and as the good-natured Sir Walter had already taken the beautiful young stranger upon his arm, she was obliged to content herself with a word and a smile.

Her host placed her by his side at dinner; but Anna took no part in the talk that went on around her, and which was indeed almost

a strange language to her. The easy flow of speech, the bright remark and prompt rejoinder, the pleasant give-and-take of familiar social intercourse, were all unknown conditions to her. She smiled scornfully when she observed how merrily little Dolly was chatting with her gracious patron Adrian Earle. When he turned his attention to her, Anna had nothing to say to him, piquing his interest by her genuine indifference to his attractions, and perhaps also by the undisguised interest with which she seemed to hang on Methuen's most casual remarks. She ate little, and spoke less, contenting herself with gazing at each speaker by turn, with the steadfast mournful look which gave such a tragic air to her face.

When the girls were come into the drawing-room, Honour felt a certain relief on finding that Anna was able to interest herself in a superb volume of photographs, illustrative of Roman and Florentine art and antiquities. She even invited Dorothy to look over them with her, promptly identifying everything that had come under her own observation, and making

an occasional remark, which showed there had at least been careful culture in this direction.

“Oh, I have been in and out of these galleries from a child with my dear father,” she said, in answer to Honour; “he used to say they were the only nursery I had ever had. I could always draw,” she added with a smile, “though I found it hard work to learn to write.”

She turned to the illustrations of *Or San Michele*, and found the St George of Donatello.

“My father always said that Philip Methuen might have served for that model. I have drawn Philip’s portrait scores and scores of times, but he is changed.”

“For the better?” asked Honour, smiling.

Anna shook her head decisively, and at the same moment Philip himself came in.

“I have got leave of absence early this evening, Miss Aylmer; I hope I am not come too soon, but I wanted a long talk with Anna. No, please, don’t think it necessary to go away—I want you to help me.”

Whenever Philip looked at Honour Aylmer,

there was always an indefinable change in his expression—an added gentleness—a shade of instinctive reverence, of which he was himself profoundly unconscious. Also, his eyes always lingered on her face a moment longer than necessity required: it was to him so exquisitely sweet a face, and he was anxious to observe if there were signs of weariness or depression in it. He knew how exacting were Oliver's demands, and how constant was her response to them.

“I must go home to-morrow,” he went on to explain, still addressing Honour. “Lord Sainsbury is to arrive on a two days' visit, and you know I am his servant at command. He has, it appears, some important communication to make, and Sir Giles is ill at ease. He fears some flaw in the indentures—”

“Which would be rather matter for rejoicing with you?”

“No; I did not mean to imply that. My interests are now identical with my uncle's.”

He paused; there was a look in the girl's eyes which plainly said that if he cared to go

on and speak of the profound disappointment of his life, her interest and sympathy were waiting on his words. It is not true he felt no inclination to yield to the temptation, but at least it was conquered as soon as admitted.

“No,” he repeated more firmly; “I have entirely accepted Sir Giles’s views. My chief anxiety is lest I should disappoint him; but the disappointment shall not come from any lack of effort on my part.”

Then he became aware that Anna Trevelyan was watching him with a look of angry impatience: all this was outside her stringent claims on his time and notice. With a slight inward feeling of annoyance, he drew a chair to her side and sat down.

“Dolly and I,” said Honour, rising, “are going to venture to bid Oliver good night,” and she led the child out of the room with her, and the two strangely assorted friends were alone together.

Philip turned and looked at Anna’s lowering face with a quickening sense of displeasure; then to qualify it came the prompt thought

of her miserable up-bringing and forlorn condition, and he put his hand upon her bowed head with a caressing touch and smile.

“Come, Anna,” he said, “this is one of the golden opportunities of life! I should have come to see you at the vicarage; but this is far better. When I am hard at work in London, I shall comfort myself with thinking that you have a powerful friend in Miss Aylmer, and that Earlescourt will make even Skeffington endurable.”

She was silent, having shaken off his touch by a quick movement, and now sat with head erect and scornful eyes averted.

“What is wrong?” he asked, coldly. “Do you not appreciate the good fortune which has fallen to your share?”

“How can I answer you?” she broke out, passionately, as if the words forced themselves against her will. “I don’t know how to express what I feel, but you are not the Philip Methuen of old times. You are cold as a stone. You are careless of my feelings, of my rights, of your own promises even. What did

you tell me that dreadful day in Florence? —That you would be my friend as long as I lived — that you loved me dearly! Do you think that young lady who has just gone away has any reason to believe that you love me dearly?"

Philip felt equally perplexed and distressed. He had a deep-rooted intention of fulfilling his pledges of friendship to poor Lewis Trevelyan's child; but he began to doubt whether, under the influence of excited sympathy, he had not expressed himself too strongly in the past, to which she clung so tenaciously. He had not meant more than that he loved her as he loved everything that appealed to his compassion, and exercised his impulse to heal and bless. Also, words which well befitted his lips as priest on the verge of consecration, bore a different significance under his changed conditions. He recalled with uneasiness Adrian's careless comments on their relations. Anyway, he was fully conscious that there was no response in his heart to the ardent challenge of her looks and reproaches.

“Tell me,” he said, “what you expected or wished me to do, and where my affection has failed. I never cease to think about you with the solicitude a brother feels for a dear sister.”

As she remained obstinately silent, he went on again.

“There is a good deal of resemblance in our situations, Anna. Suppose we look at them from the same point of view. We have both been torn up from our roots and transplanted to this far-away corner of England. Life comes to us with a new face, and demands a new line of duty. There will be no peace for either of us, unless we consent to submit to this and make the best of it. I have made up my mind to do the day’s work forced upon me, without a glance before or behind. Can’t you do the same? You profess to love me; what we really love, we obey and imitate. I shall look for acts, not words.”

“There is a difference,” she said, doggedly; “and you are either cheating yourself, or trying to cheat me, when you talk like that. All your changes are for the better, and you know

and feel that they are; all mine are for the worse."

Philip turned a little pale, as his habit was when moved.

"That is an insult, little Anna," he said, "though your mind is not fine enough to perceive it. Let that pass, for I only want to talk to you about yourself. I do not agree that your old life was better than your present life; but even if it had been, you could not have gone on living it. You will outgrow your regrets for the fond, ignorant old nurse and the wild life at the Fiesole farm—even for the dear father who can never come back. New interests, new hopes and larger thoughts, will come to you if you will open your mind to receive them. I know your aunt is austere; but there are your cousins, and uncle, and your good governess to love, and in the future Miss Aylmer will be your friend."

"And suppose I do not want Honour Aylmer for a friend? and, much as I hate Skeffington Vicarage, I should prefer to stay there for ever rather than come again to fine,

beautiful Earlescourt!" Her voice shook with passion.

"In that case," he answered, coldly, "I should think you both blind and thankless, and that I have been mistaken in believing that you had a generous heart at bottom."

"At bottom!" she cried. "What do you mean? At the bottom of what was my generous heart to be found?"

Philip looked steadily into the girl's pale defiant face. Her eyes scintillated with anger, her delicate nostrils quivered and dilated.

"It will be better for you to hear the truth. At the bottom of that selfish perverseness which has cost your father many hours of bitter anxiety, and makes me almost despair of you at times."

Anna recoiled as if she had been struck.

"Mother of God," she ejaculated, "hear him! You are cruel; you have given me a blow. I hate you, Philip!"

She was beside herself with rage and pain; the more so, perhaps, that he made no sign, but remained quite still and unmoved. Then

suddenly seizing his hand, which was hanging close to her touch, she bowed her mouth upon it, and set her small square teeth in the flesh. The next moment the paroxysm of fury was spent, and she sank to the floor at his feet, a miserable heap of penitence and shame.

Philip caught her up from the ground with a feeling of intolerable pain ; but it needed all his strength to prevent her falling again into the same posture of self-abasement. He was forced to seat her beside him, and pass his strong arm round her palpitating body. Her head drooped so low on her breast, that her face was concealed by the falling masses of her hair ; but he felt the heaving of her sobs, and the hot rain of her tears, on the hands which supported her. Words failed her : but no words could have given expression to her humiliation.

“ Anna,” he said, gently, “ forgive yourself ! I think nothing of it. It is only one proof more that you are still a child. It is an old trick not quite cured ; and you were right—I was cruel ! ”

He passed his hand caressingly over her head

as he spoke. He saw she could not speak; but he went on, trying to weld the iron while it was hot.

“I was cruel,” he repeated, “and perhaps I was unjust. Prove it to me, Anna; make me proud of my friend and sister in the future!”

“You are still cruel,” she murmured; “your kindness kills me. Give me something hard to do!”

She had ventured to look up—he met her eyes with a slight smile.

“I will,” he answered; “but you must not think I speak to vex you. What am I to say to a girl who tells me, as you did when we last met, that God, religion, and duty are words which have no meaning to her mind? Poor child, I can scarcely blame you, and I will help you if I can. Take some human example of goodness, and try and live up to it—it will lead you one step nearer the divine. Do you follow me, Anna? A sweeter, less selfish woman than Honour Aylmer never drew the breath of life: if you want to be loved—

to be something better than happy—use your utmost best to grow like her."

Undoubtedly Philip Methuen's zeal was greater than his discretion; every word that he spoke was a fresh provocation to the girl who was listening to him. She actually shivered with the intensity of her repudiation; humiliation and shame were forgotten. She looked up keenly into his face, and said—

"It is a good thing you did not become a priest—you will be able to marry this sweet young lady."

He started a little, and the colour rushed into his face.

The insolent words cut deep. Although he did not know it, his whole soul was steeped in reverent tenderness for the girl whose gracious nature he had been studying through the long days of familiar intercourse the last month had afforded. But the suggestion thus coarsely thrust upon him seemed at once a treason and an outrage. A new feeling of repulsion from the speaker vaguely stirred in

his breast, and he involuntarily moved farther away.

“ You speak like a child,” he said, “ of things you do not understand ; but it will be better for you to know that Miss Aylmer is to marry Mr Earle.”

He would have added something more, but to his unexpected relief an interruption was made by the entrance of Sir Walter and Adrian from the dining - room. The first inquiry of the former was for Honour ; the latter sat down by Anna’s side, and looked curiously into her face.

“ Excuse me,” he said, “ I am naturally impertinent, but I think you and Methuen have been quarrelling.”

“ You are right,” she answered, promptly, “ but it has been all my fault.”

Her eyes, still red with her bitter tears, sparkled ; her lips parted with an enchanting smile ; her beauty seemed suddenly to have thrown off its veil. The words Philip had just spoken permeated her blood like wine : hope, undefined indeed, but pliant and vigorous, was

born in her soul. It was no childish ardour that touched the expression of her face as she looked towards Philip. With no hindrance between them, what should prevent the realisation of the dream of her life?—to live under the same roof; to begin and end the day together; to clasp hands and kiss each other at meeting and parting; to read out of the same book, and eat at the same table; to walk side by side through life, none daring to divide them. This was what she wanted, but could scarcely tell him that it was, and all that fell short of it was misery and despair.

“Adrian, fetch Honour out of Oliver’s room,” interrupted Sir Walter; “there is a great deal too much of this indulgence. You make the boy worse than he would be.”

“Let me go!” said Philip, with a certain eagerness very unusual to him; “it is the hours before bed-time he feels to hang heaviest,” and he had left the room before Sir Walter’s impatient objections had reached his ears.

He paused for a moment at the foot of the staircase, and raised his clasped hands to his

head. He was twenty-four years old, and this was the first moment that any touch of the perturbation of passion had stirred the depths of his soul. He stood there for several minutes quite motionless outwardly, but conscious of the flow and movement of inward forces, latent until the words of Anna had quickened the life within them. Scarcely out of his cloister, and love had come to him already! To him, whose existence almost from infancy had been a protracted act of consecration, and who had been prepared to accept the denials and abstentions of the priesthood, with the superb confidence and humility of those who know their strength to be God-derived and therefore invincible. His feeling, in that moment of intense self-concentration, was that he had fallen from the cool serene heights where the human soul communes with the heavens above, into the unwholesome and heated vortex of worldly strife and passion. It was as if a knife had been laid to the very roots of his honour and pride, and cut them down at a blow.

Further, for whom had he thus fallen? For

a girl whom he knew to be the pledged wife of another man, before his eyes had even seen her. But was this feeling that possessed him love? Love was said to be urgent, aggressive, imperious; pressing down every obstacle between itself and the possession of the thing beloved; ready to barter and forego on the right hand and on the left, if only the supreme object were attained.

But he, he thought, could go through life unsatisfied yet content, so long as the sweet serenity of Honour's life was untroubled. The strongest wish of his soul was, not to be happy, but to see her happy, so that the joy and tender radiance of her natural temper might be undimmed by disappointment, or any spiritual turmoil. And this was to be accomplished, not by him—ah, God, no!—but by sweet-tempered, affectionate Adrian Earle, who had been the first to hold out the hand of friendship to himself. So let it be!

Then came another turn of thought. Standing there in the cool stillness of the moonlit hall, with the delicious rustle of leaves softly

stealing through the wide open doors, and the divine calm of a summer night brooding over the lovely outside world, it followed, almost of necessity, that reason and duty should make themselves heard. Also there was the acute sense of spiritual outrage to help him now. But in the future? Chance would throw them often together; she would approach him with the same winning friendliness she had shown him all along. He seemed to see the eager outstretched hand, the arch smile on the lovely lips, and the tender light in her eyes waiting to meet the answering glance in his. She would question him about his doings, quick to comprehend every point of his position, quicker still to sympathise with difficulties and regrets that no one seemed able to understand or suspect but herself, and yet he had told her nothing! Adrian, too, would talk to him incessantly about her, insisting on her sweetness and her charms—consulting him about their united plans, asking advice here, proposing alternative arrangements there—discussing their approaching marriage, where they

should travel, where live, what gifts he should offer.

Should he be equal to the task which in this hour of clear insight he had implicitly accepted, and never permit his secret to escape his rigid control? Worse: would there be no moments of perilous weakness, in which he should cease to care to do so? when courage and honour failed under the divine smile of the sweet blue eyes, and his soul rushed to his lips?

He heard Oliver's door open and shut, and the rustle of a woman's gown: she was coming down-stairs and a meeting was unavoidable. He changed his posture, rallied his self-command, and waited for her at the foot of the staircase.

“I have been sent to call you,” he said. “Sir Walter wants some songs, and I have lingered shamefully on my errand. I have stood here thinking the hall enchanted, and regretting that I am going away to-morrow.”

“To-morrow? I suppose you must go away to-morrow? But what will Oliver do with-

out you? You have spoilt him for all of us."

"I am going to him now to bid him good-bye, for I shall be gone before he is up to-morrow. I am glad he has made friends with me."

Honour looked at him with the words she was going to say unspoken on her lips. A ray of moonlight fell direct upon him, and, though it may seem a rash statement to make of a young Englishman in evening dress, she thought Anna Trevelyan was every way right in comparing him with the St George of Donatello.

It was not so much the beauty of the face, nor the strength and grace of the figure, but a certain noble self-controlled dignity which seemed to suggest the idea of the youthful Christian warrior. A line from Spenser flashed across her memory :—

"Right faithful, true he was, in deed and word :
But of his cheere did seem too solemn sad."

"If it is really your last evening," she said,—

“ and I am glad to see you seem to regret it,—let us go back to Oliver’s room together for an hour. Anna has told me that you are a great musician, which you have kept a profound secret, and Oliver, that you have sung to him when you and he were alone. I will not repeat what they say about it, for it would vex you ; but I ask if you have dealt kindly with your friend, knowing my passion for music ? Let me hear you before you go away ! ”

“ I think I would rather not, though I would do much to give you pleasure. I am not at all at home in drawing-room music. What I sang to Oliver were echoes of the churches—chants, and hymns, and spiritual songs. I should have to unmake myself before I could sing to please a fashionable audience.”

“ I will not urge the point,” she answered ; “ I see I am not judged worthy. But Lord Sainsbury is a fanatic in music—he will discover your gifts, and overcome your scruples. My aunt, whom I am sorry to say you do not yet know, is sometimes at his town house ; she and his sister are great friends. You see what de-

lightful chances of meeting there will be for all of us in the future! Besides, there is a long stretch of time between this and February, and Methuen Place always spends Christmas at Earlescourt."

She smiled, and was going to pass him on her way to the drawing-room, when he interrupted her intention.

"If you will allow me, Miss Aylmer, I will bid you good-bye now, for I have half promised my uncle to be with him by breakfast-time, and shall start too early to see you again. I thought yesterday I had been careless of his comfort in staying here so long, but the charm of this house was so new to me, I fell into the snare. You have all shown me a kindness I can never repay."

She held out her hand at once with no shadow upon the brightness of her face.

"I am glad we are your first friends, and have won you," she said; "for when you go into the great world you will soon have so many, we should have stood no chance."

She looked back and waved her hand as she

entered the stream of light from the open door of the drawing-room, seeing that he still stood watching her, and then she shut the warmth and sparkle in with her, and Philip went slowly up-stairs to Oliver's room.

CHAPTER XIV.

“ This castle hath a pleasant seat ; the air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses.”

—*Macbeth.*

It was eight o'clock in the evening of the next day, and the three great windows of the dining-room at Methuen Place stood wide open to the terrace and lawns, and the splash and tinkle of the fountain, the waters of which gleamed crimson and gold in the intense sunset glow.

A small oval table was laid for dinner for three, with exquisite precision — the finest of damask, the choicest of the seldom-used treasures of plate, had been produced and furbished for the occasion of Lord Sainsbury's visit, which was one of exceeding anxiety to the old servants of the family. The *menu* of that evening's repast had been studied and elaborated for days

in the spacious sunlit kitchen of the house, for it was felt that the social credit of the establishment was at stake. Every flaw and omission would be promptly detected by the great man accustomed to feast at kings' tables, and would be scored to their own master's disadvantage.

The guest at this hour was already arrived, fetched from the station in the old brougham by the superannuated greys, which had been so contemptuously reported upon to Philip on the first day of his arrival at Trichester, and which occasioned great searchings of heart to the old coachman himself, who had known them through every stage of their existence. Even Sir Giles had shaken his head dubiously as he saw them brought round to the front, with as much dash and effect as their advanced age admitted.

“ Undoubtedly Sainsbury will think it a sorry turn out! A smart pair from the ‘Antelope’ would have been better, but it is too late now. Bennett will do his best to nurse them on the way in, but don’t make any excuses, Philip.”

Philip was going to the station to meet their guest.

“It would never have occurred to me to do so. So long as we give him of our best, a guest is well served; but my impression is that Lord Sainsbury is less exacting than you imagine.”

Assuredly had the chariot of the sun been awaiting him, the great man could not have appeared more perfectly satisfied. He had nothing with him but a small portmanteau, which Philip himself took from him as he pulled it from under the seat of the railway carriage. A whisper had got abroad amongst the little crowd at the railway station who Sir Giles Methuen’s guest was, and his tall spare figure and marked countenance were recognised by a few amongst them, and swift as light the information flew. Some hats were lifted, a faint cheer raised, and while these marks of recognition were graciously acknowledged by their object, Philip observed the flush of annoyance that came over the pale weary-looking face.

“This way,” he whispered; “if we go through the station we shall be close upon the carriage;”

and in a few moments more Lord Sainsbury was leaning back against the well-padded though moth-eaten cushions, with a look of intense relief upon his face.

“What a country, Methuen, for a fox-hunter!” he said, looking out upon the glorious expanse of downs which swelled to the horizon on either hand, as soon as they were well clear of the precincts of the town. “Do you appreciate your privileges, or has your foreign training smothered the national instincts?”

“In a very great measure, I fear. I can ride, but not to hounds. I have not a spark of enthusiasm in that direction; but I hope a taste for fox-hunting is not considered by Lord Sainsbury a necessary part of a young man’s equipment?”

“I have always thought myself,” returned the other, stretching himself more at his ease, “that the life of a country squire is the most enviable under the sun, granting that one had no ambition beyond it.”

Philip smiled.

“Ah! I see you are already putting me down

as a speaker of platitudes ; but in official life we are all speakers of platitudes. There is no more useful accomplishment for a man to possess than the being able to utter some axiom with an air of engaging originality.” Then, suddenly changing his tone, he asked abruptly, “ You are still in the same mind in my behalf, Mr Methuen ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ I warned you at the Embassy—in jest it may have appeared to you, but it was done in all sincerity—that I was a man hard to please and difficult to live with, and I wish to repeat the warning. If a political career be your object, I can help you materially, no doubt, and I am disposed to do so ; but you will have to buy the benefit dear. I never spare myself nor my subordinates. I expect people who work under my orders to be able to coerce the flesh to the spirit, and I am completely intolerant of sickness, feebleness, and fatigue. Simply, the matter in hand must be got through in due course—I accept no excuses.”

“It is difficult to pledge one’s self absolutely to unlimited requirements, but all the strength of body and mind I possess I am prepared to place at your service.”

“Not, I hope, with any expectation of ready and affectionate recognition? I never praise any man, and I thank very few. I am given to understand that you are a devout Catholic?”

“So much so that, were not your faith the same, I should not now have the honour of listening to Lord Sainsbury’s conditions of service.”

Lord Sainsbury looked at him keenly, and Philip met the protracted gaze modestly, it is true, as became his age and position, but with perfect firmness. A slight smile touched his companion’s thin lips.

“On that point we shall probably not quarrel,” he answered; “but it strikes me you have preserved an unusual faculty of independence after some twelve years’ training in the Abbé Olier’s seminaries. That is a matter of no consequence to me, except under chances of mental collision. Should such chances occur, it goes without saying that my will is absolute.”

Philip made no reply.

“ You reserve the point, Mr Methuen ? ” asked Lord Sainsbury, sharply.

“ Only under circumstances which are never likely to occur—a question of duty to a higher authority than yours.”

“ I think,” was the answer, “ you may rest satisfied on that point. My notions of duty to Queen, church, or country, to my own honour or the honour of another man, are possibly on as high a level as Mr Philip Methuen’s. I can even conceive of the possibility of a difference of opinion between us, when the supreme right might not lie with him ! ”

The tone was trenchant, and there was a flash in the steel blue eyes which gave a full illustration of his own recent warning. It was perhaps the influence of his severe training to obedience, or the natural generosity of his temper, that the only feeling excited in Philip’s mind by this spurt of indignation was one of compunction and regret.

“ I beg your pardon,” he said, simply ; “ I

see I have been guilty of an impertinence without intending it. I meant no more than that there are occasions when no man can judge what he ought to do but himself."

The apology was coldly received, and for the rest of the way conversation flagged; but as the carriage turned in at the park gates, Lord Sainsbury uttered an exclamation of pleasure.

"What a pleasaunce!" he exclaimed. "Here, in fact, stand Tennyson's 'immemorial elms.' We Sainsburys—mere mushroom-growths of the present century—have nothing to show like this. On the strength of Methuen Park, Philip, I am disposed to forgive you,—you may well hold your head higher than I."

He repeated these compliments with still greater suavity to Sir Giles himself, who stood waiting to receive him on the threshold of his door, and won the heart of every member of the household by some word of recognition, or gracious expression of delight in his surroundings.

From the ancient Banksia rose-tree which

grew close up to his chamber-window, to the fine old plate which had been buried under the floor of the stables during the wars of the Parliament (which story Sir Giles was never reluctant to tell), not a point was too insignificant to catch and claim his notice.

By the time the successful dinner was over, and the exquisite home-grown dessert placed on the table, which had been wheeled close to the wide issue of the open window, Sir Giles's slight anxieties were all allayed, and he was conscious of the profound satisfaction of the man whose hospitality to an honoured guest has been a quiet but complete success.

Lord Sainsbury leaned back in his chair with an intense enjoyment of the charm of the situation. The moon was at the full, and her unclouded light not only revealed the outline of every flower and tree, subduing each diverse tint to lustrous silver, but paled the flame of the lamps and candles inside the apartment, producing effects of weird picturesqueness.

“It seems strange,” he said, “that a man with such a paradise as this in possession and

prospect should want to fight his way through the thorny world outside! Were I in your nephew's place, Sir Giles, I should select some Eve to share it with me, and sit down with her under the ancestral fig-tree till summoned to the paradise above!"

"Philip prefers to earn his heavenly reward, and has no taste whatever for the *dolce far niente*; also you forget, my dear lord, that it is only to the weary that rest seems desirable. Still, there is a young man, a near neighbour of ours, Sir Walter Earle's eldest son, who has marked out for himself precisely the programme you describe. He is engaged to be married to the most delightful girl in Dorset."

"Ah!" said Lord Sainsbury, languidly, "my sister knows the family, and is anxious to press me into the train of the young lady's admirers —somehow opportunity failed last season. By the way, do you know Miss Aylmer, Mr Methuen?" he asked, with sudden abruptness, and facing round full on Philip.

"I have spent the last month at Earlescourt in daily intercourse with her, and I think my

uncle might have safely challenged, not Dorset only, but all England to find her equal."

The light was not good enough to observe his face so closely as his interrogator desired, but at least the readiness of reply and quiet level tone might be supposed calculated to disarm suspicion. Nevertheless, Lord Sainsbury smiled slightly to himself with an increased satisfaction in his own acuteness.

"I think," he said, after a little pause, "that the time is come to explain to you, Sir Giles, why I ventured to offer myself as your guest. I attributed it to the desire to discuss more fully with you the details of your nephew's appointment—and that, in brief, is my motive. The fact is, that circumstances have changed so materially since we last met, that I preferred to state them in person."

Sir Giles bowed a little stiffly. Had the great man changed his mind?

"Do not for a moment suppose," the other resumed, quick to observe the impression produced, "that I wish to go back from my engagement. I may add that the little I have

seen of Mr Methuen to-day has considerably increased my personal desire for closer relations; but the bargain stood for London. If the venue is changed to Calcutta, I am not so unreasonable as to expect it to hold good."

There was a brief shock of surprise; then Sir Giles exclaimed, with rather forced heartiness, "Is it to be so? I congratulate you with all my heart. The Government, then, have at length discovered—"

"The Government have discovered nothing at all; but have been forced to accept the resignation of another faithful, ill-used public servant, who has worn out health and strength of body, brain and conscience, at the post of highest difficulty and responsibility. He is only waiting for his successor to go out before he comes home to die."

"I withdraw my congratulations. If toughness of constitution and nerve are essential qualifications for the post, your decision is suicidal: you will scarcely obtain the consent of your friends."

"I have not yet consulted them; this com-

munication is confidential, on account of your personal interest in the matter. Creaking gates hang long ; and there are some temperaments seemingly feeble which have a certain faculty of resilience that stands in as good stead as thews and sinews. But the question before us now is not whether I am fit for Governor-General of India, but whether you can part with your nephew.”

Sir Giles passed his hand nervously over his eyes.

“ There is no need for decision at present,” Lord Sainsbury hastened to add. “ I simply put the matter before you for consideration, unless Mr Methuen has already pronounced against the scheme in his own mind.”

“ I have not done that,” said Philip ; “ but I do not feel free to express any personal inclination. I think I can engage to give you an answer in the morning.”

“ Precisely ; we will dismiss the matter till then.”

Lord Sainsbury retired early under plea of fatigue ; in reality, he perceived that Sir Giles

Methuen was restless and preoccupied, in spite of his courtly old-fashioned efforts to hide the fact—evidently on the tenter-hooks of anxiety to ascertain his nephew's mind on this new departure, or to express his own.

As soon as he was gone, Sir Giles turned sharply upon Philip.

“ You have already made up your mind in this matter ? It is a formality to consult me ? ”

There was the accusation of wounded affection in the tone and in the keen flash of the eyes.

“ I have made up my mind subject to your approval. It is enough for you to speak the word, and I remain.”

“ Ah, I thought as much ! This is the consecrated youth, without ambition or capacity for diplomacy, who requires divine sanctions and religious aims before he sets out on a career ! My memory is good, nephew. Yet you are prepared, I see, to throw over every consideration of gratitude and duty, and embrace the first chance of distinction which comes in your way.”

Where is the reason in arguing with the unreasonable? Philip naturally held his tongue.

Sir Giles pushed away his chair and took a turn to the other end of the room.

“Is what I say unworthy of notice? At least you must plead guilty to having possessed a very imperfect notion of your own character?”

“Yes,” said Philip, in a low tone, and with a dreary smile on his lips, “I plead guilty to that.”

Sir Giles was slightly appeased. He came back to his nephew’s side.

“You like this man Sainsbury?”

“I do.”

“And the notion of exile from England and me?”

“I like the notion of hard work and routine duty. I accepted Lord Sainsbury’s offer, in the first place, at your command, and thought you would agree that it would look like cowardice or breach of faith to break an engagement because the conditions were a little changed. I

was influenced by the knowledge I had of your own chivalrous sense of honour."

"Also by the complete ignoring of any regret I might feel in parting with the nephew pledged to fulfil the part of a son?"

"I frankly own I did not much consider that. You have known me so short a time—just three months—I could scarcely suppose such a feeling would be stronger than the decided wishes you have expressed about my future. But, I repeat, it only remains for you to command me to throw up Lord Sainsbury's offer. Can I say more?"

Sir Giles took another turn in the room.

"And how long, nephew Philip," he asked, drily, "do you require before you commit yourself to the weakness of affectionate regard? Three months have been long enough for me to discover that I liked you; what period of time, I repeat, would it take to reconcile you to my shortcomings and peculiarities?"

"Enough!" said Philip, getting up, "the matter is decided. I stay here! I am a bad hand at protestations; but I will give you the most convincing proof that I love you. On

second thoughts, three months seem to me long enough to form attachments which will last as long as life lasts."

He went up to the place where Sir Giles was standing with his back against the ponderous oak sideboard, and his grey eyes alight with irritation and sensibility combined, and taking the old man's hand, kissed it with the charming foreign action which sat so naturally upon him.

"Understand me! I will never leave you without your own consent. I will find some home work to do."

Sir Giles looked at him intently for a moment.

"Good!" he answered. "So let it stand! And now to bed. God bless you, Philip!"

The next morning was spent by Sir Giles and his guest in a visit of inspection to the home farm, Lord Sainsbury saying that he wished to absorb as many rural sights and sounds and fragrant breaths of cattle, as the forty-eight hours would allow.

Philip was not invited to join them, nor indeed had he much inclination.

He had spent a great part of the night in thinking again over his position, which he stigmatised as one of shameful dereliction—in love with another man's plighted wife !

That was the way he chose to consider it, pouring condemnation and contempt on his own weakness.

Of course it was a weakness that should be conquered at any cost—torn up by the roots, cast into the oven and consumed. But the process that might have been possible with half the world between them, and time and brain taxed by hard and unfamiliar work on foreign ground, would be—not impossible—but terribly severe in the constant contact of society, and the far more trying intercourse of close domestic friendship.

He had said this to himself before, when the first shock of discovery had startled him; but he seemed to feel it the more keenly because the chance of escape had been offered him, and he was constrained to reject it. Besides, one may resolve to conquer in this sort of conflict, and discover in the end that the victory is out-

side human nature. He could not fail to consider that the tender, reverential passion which he felt for Honour Aylmer was based on much stronger foundations than the love which is born of the exquisite curves of a woman's form, of the soft languors of rose-red yielding lips, and of drooping love-lighted eyes.

If he loved her because of her sweet intelligence and goodness, how could he cease to love her so long as these qualities endured? It seemed to him as if some superhuman hand had touched the sealed fountains of his manhood, and bidden the living waters flow to vivify and strengthen every faculty he possessed. This love, which must be stifled, was, after all, a form of worship—a phase of his ingrained religiousness;—for what he adored was the beauty of self-sacrifice—the supreme virtue without which neither man nor woman would have pleased him. It was the total absence of this faculty in Anna Trevelyan which was changing his early tenderness into a sentiment almost approaching repulsion.

Well, there would have been no danger to

others, and perhaps only a salutary pain for himself, if he had cherished this holy passion in the silent depths of his heart, and delivered up utterly all the rest of himself to Lord Sainsbury's demands. Sitting immersed in official business under his chief's strenuous influence, in the far-away palace on the Hooghly, with the monotonous beat of the punka overhead, and a heathen city around him, he would have had short time for the indulgence of a personal sorrow.

For all that, the decision of last night was binding; suffer what he might, his first duty was to the generous kinsman who had accepted him as a son.

He spent a solitary day. His uncle and Lord Sainsbury did not return to luncheon, but sent him a message that they had taken a sudden resolution to call upon Sir Walter Earle, a circumstance, illogical as it may appear, that by no means added to Philip's tranquillity.

He spent an hour in wandering vaguely about the gardens, speculating upon the impression that Honour would make on Lord Sainsbury,

and going over in his own mind the whole circle of her gifts and graces, with that inherent capacity for self-torment which a hopeless lover possesses.

At length, heartily ashamed of himself, he returned to the house, and taking up his books of systematised study, read and wrote with forced perseverance till the shades of evening began to fall.

Then, with a sensation of almost physical pain gnawing at his heart, none the more tolerable because he tried to ignore or deny it, he pushed aside books and papers, and sitting down to an old piano the library contained, allowed himself the relief of uttering through this finer medium the feelings to which no other expression must be given.

The music to which he was most accustomed served his purpose. The well-known "Misereres" and chants which touch the hearts of careless thousands of English and American strangers who throng the vast area of St Peter's at Christmas and Eastertide, were familiar to him; and there is a certain movement of Bach's

—“ *De Profundis* ”—which seems to include the whole diapason of human necessity and aspiration.

So well did it respond to the mood of the singer, that when the last notes had died under his fingers, he instinctively went back and repeated the whole marvellous passage again. As he brought it a second time to a conclusion, he was startled by a deep sigh of satisfaction from the recesses of a distant chair, and Lord Sainsbury, rising up from it, came towards him in the deepening twilight.

He looked deeply moved.

“ Good heavens, Methuen ! ” he said, “ what power helps you to sing like that ? You might have the sins and sorrows of a world upon your soul, with faith and courage enough to lay down all the burden at the feet of God ! St Sulpice must have a far wider range of experience than I imagined. But what is the matter ? You are displeased ? ”

“ Pardon me, Lord Sainsbury, I think I have every right to be displeased. I believed that I was alone.”

His eyes flashed, and his face was white with indignation. His feeling was that a stranger had come in by stealth and read his naked soul. Lord Sainsbury laid his hand kindly on his shoulder.

“Hear reason,” he said. “As I came into the house I heard the sound of a piano, which I could no more resist, when touched as you touched it, than steel can resist the magnet. I was too far off to distinguish your voice at first. It was no fault of mine that you were so engrossed as not to hear me open the door. I simply availed myself of a privilege I had no idea you would begrudge me. I bless the powers who endowed you with such a voice, and the teachers who have had the training of it! Please God, Methuen, you shall be the David to my Saul!”

“I do not understand.”

“Sir Giles did not mean to take you at your word last night—there is a touch of almost feminine inconsistency and sensibility about the old man. He desired to see you willing to stay, that it might be in his power to bid

you go. I am very pleased you have decided to cast in your lot with mine."

The rest of the evening was taken up in discussions of the now accepted event. Sir Giles stipulated for not more than two years' absence, and constant correspondence.

"You will then come home for good and marry," he said. "You will marry the wife that I shall have spent the interval in choosing for you. Lord Sainsbury will come home too. The power of resilience he speaks of will have become flaccid by that time, and change will be imperative."

The last words Lord Sainsbury said to Philip the next morning, as they walked up and down the platform at Trichester waiting for the up-train, were, "Sir Giles thinks I am not going to start for the next month or two, and I had not the heart to undeceive him. But I have received my marching orders already. We shall sail in ten days' time. You will get your summons by to-morrow's post. Bring your uncle up to town with you — looking after your outfit will divert his mind. Good-bye!"

CHAPTER XV.

“To great and small thing love alike can reach,
And cares for each as all, and all as each.

The rose aye wears the silent thorn at heart,
And never yet might pain for love depart.”

—TRENCH.

THERE are periods of time when a month, even a day, may include the issues of a lifetime; and again, in the experience of most of us, long periods occur when the wheels of existence drag slowly and heavily, with little seeming advance upon the onward track.

Honour Aylmer was nineteen years old when Philip Methuen went to India, and her life had been as uneventful as that of most girls of her position, who are too carefully guarded for much variety of incident. Too young to remember her parents, her mother's devoted friend, Miss Earle, had accepted and fulfilled the charge of her with such tender fidelity

that the girl scarcely missed what she had lost. When Sir Walter Earle's wife died, and Miss Earle was invited by her brother to assume the control of his household, she made it a condition that she might bring her adopted daughter with her, and that henceforth Earles-court should be considered her home.

It was a happy day for all concerned when the lovely little girl appeared amongst them. Adrian was at that time twelve years of age, being four years older than Honour, and the younger boy, deformed and crippled from his birth, was a puny suffering child of three. From that time to the present she had been the playfellow, nurse, and teacher of the one, and the fellow-student and *bon camarade* of the other, who threw off his mental indolence for the first time when he found how closely the limpid-minded, keen-witted little girl trod upon his footsteps. For the most part the two studied together under the same masters until Adrian went to Brazenose—for the boy, unfortunately for himself, was held to be too delicate for a public school; and even when he had

entered upon his Oxford curriculum, Honour did her best to keep pace with him, so far as home teaching allowed. She was one of those girls, becoming increasingly uncommon, for whom study, family affection, and home interests sufficed ; she did not continually demand, as essentials of existence, new books, fresh scenes, and a succession of pleasures. As a matter of social routine, she was carefully prepared to play her part in society, and was taken up to town in due course to make her curtsey to her Sovereign ; and after that event she and Miss Earle spent a month or two in the height of the season at the fine old family house in Arlington Street, while Sir Walter devoted himself to his political duties, and Adrian was their ready attendant at theatres, galleries, and concert-rooms. As Honour was herself a very clever artist and musician, these things drew her with a resistless magnetism, as did also the opportunities she enjoyed of the higher forms of social intercourse which Sir Walter Earle's position naturally provided for her.

But she always returned to Earlescourt with satisfied content, to pursue her favourite studies with a zest which made of the last point gained the starting-place for new attainments, and with her love and sympathy and patience towards poor young Oliver, animated by absence to greater devotion. It was indeed well for her that Miss Earle was always on watchful guard to prevent her carrying her ardour too far on both these lines, and to insist on as much open-air exercise and neighbourly intercourse as seemed good for body and mind.

It had been a matter of private arrangement between brother and sister, that Honour and Adrian should marry if their childish affection could be trained into a feeling of mutual regard, both perceiving that the indolent and self-indulgent young man could have no better incentive or safeguard in life than the serene and generous steadfastness of the girl who had walked by his side from childhood. At the time they had made Philip Methuen's acquaintance, this scheme was pretty well known and accepted by the outside world; and without any

definite explanation or engagement, the young people had tacitly acquiesced in it themselves ; —the one being fully persuaded that a sweeter, more loyal creature never drew the breath of life ; and the other, that no woman could ever have Adrian's welfare so near her heart as she herself. Besides, it would please Oliver.

During the long winter which succeeded Philip's departure, Anna Trevelyan lived much at Earlescourt, and ultimately spent weeks there together at a time, being associated by Honour in her own lessons in music and painting. She even gained the entry to Oliver's chamber, and would amuse him by the hour together with rapid and spirited caricatures of every person with whom she had come into contact, or even only casually seen ; or by passionate descriptions of Florence and its treasures of art, and her own wild life in her early past.

She had, too, a certain gift of improvisation which fascinated the boy. It was not worth very much intellectually, but when a strikingly beautiful girl recites with passionate feeling,

in an imperfectly understood language, verses or rhetorical apostrophes out of her own head, the listener is not often disposed to be critical. Anna at such times looked magnificent; and the audience was not limited to Oliver, Adrian being constantly in attendance. He also amused himself by teaching her to ride and shoot at a target, accomplishments which she readily acquired and delighted to exercise. It was true that, in his delicate languid way, he often made fun of her and aroused her scornful anger; but she pleased him as much, and excited him more, in these moods than in her quieter ones.

It was a new thing to him to be in constant intercourse with a girl who was always offering him fresh surprises, and upon whose reception of friendly advances it was impossible to calculate.

Honour, in her turn, found Anna's society stimulating, and was so deeply anxious for her welfare and improvement, that she was sometimes at a loss to understand the motive which influenced her. Anna was acutely perceptive,

and made rapid progress in any study which it suited her to pursue ; but there was no breadth nor depth in her intellect, not a touch of the humility and veneration without which there is no true discipleship. Also there was in her nature a radical and persistent selfishness, which forbade the hope of any really fair structure being raised on so mean and narrow a foundation.

Oliver Earle, with his keen susceptibility, soon discovered this flaw of character.

“ Why do you like Anna Trevelyan, Honour ? ” he asked one day. “ Sometimes I hate her, or should hate her, only she is so splendid to look at.”

His eyes dwelt wistfully on Honour’s face.

“ Don’t mind my saying that,” he added. “ Hers is a *beauté du diable*, as I heard Adrian telling her the other day ; yours—how shall I put it ? Come close and kiss me, dear ! ”

She did as he asked, and he saw, what was very unusual, that there were tears in her eyes.

“ Yours,” he continued, pressing her hand

against his cheek, "is more like that of Guercino's *Guardian Angel*, as Browning puts it. You are one of the 'Birds of God.'"

The feeling of sadness which was associated with Anna in Honour's mind was of so subtle a character as to be difficult to explain. It was no longer because the girl complained of misery or oppression in her aunt's family, for either she had learnt a measure of conformity or the rule of harshness was relaxed. One circumstance alone made a great difference: there was no longer any difficulty in getting her to learn. She was now avid of knowledge such as women of society are conventionally supposed to possess. Then her intimacy with the Earlescourt family counted for much. Mrs Sylvestre was too diplomatic to put it in the power of her niece to pour forth reasonable complaints in her passionate way to the sympathising household, nor was she blind to the contingent advantages which accrued to her own children. But Honour was conscious that, with all this intellectual and material improvement, there remained a want

in the girl of that finer sense and breath of aspiration which were necessary to fit her—for what? For that development which Philip Methuen expected.

Anna Trevelyan was one of the few to whom he wrote, at long intervals, and these letters she was in the habit of showing to Honour Aylmer, as conferring a certain distinction, and establishing that link of connection between them to which she tenaciously clung. The letters themselves had no strong personal interest except as minute and careful replies to her own.

His clear-sightedness and fidelity in all matters relating to the faults and errors which Anna freely exposed in her correspondence, sometimes made Honour smile with an odd feeling of relief from some latent anxiety, and excited a burst of indignant disappointment in Anna.

“In my eyes he has no faults,” she said on one occasion. “Why does he not look in the same light at me?”

For the rest, there were intelligent observations on the scenes and circumstances by which

he was surrounded, as recorded by a superior mind for the instruction and amusement of an inferior ; but of personal or of political details there were none. The fact was, he felt bound to answer the frequent letters he received, and equally bound to moderate the extravagant and erroneous impression of the closeness of their relations, which he perceived with anxiety Anna cherished.

These letters formed a curious contrast to those which Philip Methuen wrote by every mail to his uncle, and in which he did his best to daguerreotype his daily life for the satisfaction and amusement of the latter. There was scarcely an interest or an event, personal, social, or political, which was not transcribed for the benefit and interest of this exacting but affectionate kinsman. He showed him how he lived and what he was, with a vivid fidelity which certainly helped to bridge over the distance between them ; only reserving that innermost circle of experience which no wise man or woman discloses to any human ken.

And so the uneventful months flowed on till

the two years of his absence had been accomplished and the third begun.

During this protracted period the subject of Adrian's and Honour's marriage had been often renewed, but the event, though still regarded in the light of a foregone conclusion, was invariably postponed under some plea or another.

Naturally it was Honour who raised the difficulties, but an ardent lover would soon have disposed of them. Adrian had never been that: his father said with a sneer, born of profound if concealed disappointment, that his temperament was too tepid for any great passion; but the girl who had known him from a boy, and whose insight was quickened both by her intellect and affection, was of a different opinion.

It was the growth of a strong, if not a great passion which was coming between them. She saw the increasing fascination which Anna Trevelyan, to whom each month seemed to bring a finer development of her superb beauty, exercised over him. Adrian had long ceased to rally and reprove, and contented himself now with a close watchful observation. Honour had

studied his face as he sat listening to Anna's improvisations, and drawn inevitable conclusions.

During the third season after Methuen's departure, Anna had been invited to accompany the Earles to town, and had taken a passionate delight in all the pleasures she could grasp—first and greatest being the admiration she herself everywhere excited.

It was a subject of indignant mortification to Miss Earle to see how entirely the loveliness of her own beloved ward was eclipsed by the defiant beauty and audacious unconventionality of the girl who never seemed to recognise the goodness which had been heaped upon her, or the almost divine patience with which her provocations were endured. It was on this occasion that Adrian, who had often absented himself from his father's town-house during the season, kept his fashionable terms with the greatest assiduity.

He was at Honour's side, as companion and convoy perpetually, not only at daylight gatherings and exhibitions, but in the ball-rooms

hitherto abhorred and shunned. But Honour at least made no mistakes. It can never be otherwise than painful for a woman to feel herself to be superseded in the favour of the man who once loved her; but she had the courage to recognise and accept the truth before any one else guessed it.

Anna was Honour's unfailing companion on all these occasions, and the latter saw clearly that while Adrian's loyalty constrained him to devote to her the attentions which were her undeniable right, it was on the looks and words of the other, in spite, or it might have been because of, her almost insolent indifference, that his observance hung. Also she had watched him, after he had scrupulously fulfilled his functions of her partner at some dance, seek Anna's side with a solicitude his eyes never betrayed to her, and perceived that their routine dances were the price he paid for the rapture of a waltz with the woman he loved.

He grew taciturn, irritable, and uncertain, and threw the blame of his temper on his health, which had never been robust, and talked of a

journey round the world. Then Honour Aylmer thought the time to speak was come.

“What good would travel do you, Adrian,” she asked, on one of the rare occasions when they were alone together, “if you left behind the thing you wanted, and took with you the burden which I see is wearing out your strength?”

He turned very pale. “What do you mean?” he answered. “I will never give you cause to reproach me, Honour.” There was that eager tone of self-justification in his voice, which is only another form of inward dissatisfaction.

“Happily,” she answered, with an effort, which, however, she did not allow to appear, “there will be as little cause as inclination for reproach. We love each other very dearly, Adrian—as fondest brother and sister love—but we are both beginning to find out that something beyond that is wanted for those who are to spend life together. We will set each other free, and change nothing!”

She could see the colour come back into his face and the light quicken in his eyes, and

involuntarily a little stab smote her. Her love was perhaps deeper than she described; anyway, it gives a pang to a woman's heart to see that a man adds to his happiness when he lets her go.

"Is that the truth?" he asked, "or gracious falsehood to reconcile me to my accusing conscience?"

He looked earnestly into the sweet face which met his anxious inquiring gaze so steadfastly, and then caught her hand in an effusion of gratitude.

"Honour, you have been my good angel since the day your little feet first crossed our door—do not cast me off now! I thank God I read in your dear eyes that it is not in my power to hurt you much; and yet am I not caitiff and poltroon to rejoice that you have not found me worth loving? What has led you to the belief that—that we have both deceived ourselves?"

He questioned her with so eager a solicitude, and with eyes so weary and sad, that had the facts been otherwise her pity as well as her

pride would have withheld the admission. She smiled, but there was a little sorrow and regret tempering the smile.

“I think I was never at any time sure how much I loved you, Adrian, or whether the love I had was of the proper complexion for a wife ; but when of late I have watched the expression of your face, and heard the tone of your voice when you looked at or spoke to Anna Trevelyan—forgive me, yours is an open secret !—I felt no manner of doubt that you at least were no lover of mine, and—the discovery will not break my heart.”

“And in not being so I condemn myself,” he answered : “those who have walked with angels should at least know how to worship. In revenge, no one knows better than I that Anna Trevelyan is of another sort, yet—I shall waste my life in trying to win her !”

“And she must be very hard to win if she resists you—as lover,” said Honour, smiling. “Hitherto you have not been free to try ;” and she rose and left him.

The fact of the rupture of the family engage-

ment was declared at once, at Adrian's own request. He was anxious to meet and overcome the disappointment and displeasure he knew it would excite,—also to win his father's consent to his choice. Sir Walter Earle, though bitterly annoyed at this fresh failure of his hopes in respect to his son, surprised him by a readier acquiescence than he had ventured to expect, to Miss Earle's indignant amazement, whose own sense of injury, not to say outrage, was intense. Anna preferred to Honour! But the wary baronet, who had enjoyed a long experience of the sex, yielded the point simply because he felt convinced his son had small chance of success. He had watched Anna Trevlyan closely, and was morally certain that it was not given to the delicate and fastidious Adrian to conquer that young lady's arrogance and scorn.

CHAPTER XVI.

“Love of my bonds partook, that I might be
In turn partaker of its liberty.
Oh, merchant at heaven’s mart for heavenly ware !
Love is the only coin that passes there.”

—TRENCH.

SUCH was the situation of affairs when Philip Methuen returned to England after an absence of almost three years.

Sir Giles, after his departure, fell back into the old habits of seclusion and reserve, which were aggravated by the knowledge he had obtained from an eminent physician, before leaving London, that a malady which had long tormented his comfort, without being seriously regarded, had developed into an incurable and mortal disease.

This fact became known to Mrs Methuen in her Florentine villa, and at once suggested to her the propriety of offering herself as nurse

and companion to the friendless old man—a scheme which she would assuredly have carried out, in spite of his opposition, had not death, in its most sudden and appalling form, stepped between them. She died from the effects of a carriage accident, after a few days' severe suffering, during which she lay taciturn and conscience-stricken, and waited on by no friend nearer or dearer than the old physician Richetti, and her maid, who was only withheld from deserting her mistress by a sense of shame and some hope of reward.

“What a grievous pity,” said Richetti to her an hour or two before she passed away, “that the good son is not here to comfort and sustain my lady!”

“Yes,” she answered; “I daresay he would have been almost as kind to me as to that poor creature, Lewis Trevelyan. I hope he will not think so ill of his mother, doctor, as to spend all the little she leaves him in masses for her soul! Give him that message from me if you ever meet.”

And this message, sent by Richetti to Sir

Giles Methuen, was duly transmitted to Philip, and added another pang to the sharp and mournful memories which, without break or alleviation, were associated with his experiences as a son. It was one note the less of recall to his native land.

Meantime, there was something pathetic in the courage which enabled the failing old baronet to submit to the protracted absence which he felt so keenly, in order not to interrupt a career which was fulfilling the long-delayed hopes and ambition of his life.

Lord Sainsbury had alleged himself to be a man chary of praise and recognition, and doubtless it was the result of a wide and penetrating acquaintance with human nature, which led him to accept the best of any man's service as a matter of routine duty. Thus he made no exception in favour of the young man towards whom he felt secretly a strong inclination. But he was none the less a man of generous sensibility, and appreciating to the full the sacrifice Sir Giles had made in parting with his nephew, he rewarded it in a way he knew would please him

best. Amidst the heavy pressure of public affairs he managed to find time to write him an occasional letter, in which he expressed, with an ardour which would have astonished his best friends, his sense of Philip's intelligence and devotion to whatever work he had in hand.

As time passed, opportunities occurred in connection with a case of suspected treachery in one of the native princes, for the display of faculties of a much higher and more serviceable kind than those with which he had at first credited the young man. Methuen developed not only a patient sagacity in threading the mazes of oriental intrigue, but a subtlety of intuition and resource, which promised to place him in the first rank of diplomatists. These gifts, as Lord Sainsbury pointed out to Sir Giles, in conjunction with the (perhaps still rarer) qualities of absolute fidelity and trustworthiness, and the natural charm of manner and person, were surely not intended to be hidden under a bushel, and formed an adequate plea for longer detention of his services.

Then, when the renewed term had expired,

an attack of fever, followed by a tedious convalescence, exhausted the Viceroy's strength, and formed an all but irresistible claim upon Philip's gratitude and regard. It was in his power, owing to their intimate relations, to do more for his chief than any other man could have done, and in meeting the appeal, so to increase the affection with which Lord Sainsbury regarded him as to render the reluctance to part with him still more difficult to overcome.

Owing to these circumstances, it was not until Sir Giles Methuen's rapidly failing strength led to serious anxiety among his friends, that he took the step of insisting upon his nephew's return, in terms sufficiently peremptory to secure his object. But as soon as this was done, his impatience and restlessness became painfully acute. Philip was coming home overland from Brindisi, having some commissions to execute for Lord Sainsbury in Paris, and this fact was a source of intense irritation to the old man's exhausted patience. It was the last straw which broke the back of his endurance.

It was the height of the London season, and

the Earlescourt family were established in town, with Anna Trevelyan as their guest, as before stated. No direct correspondence with Philip Methuen had been kept up by any member of it, all the knowledge they had of his Indian experiences being derived from his letters to Anna, or from those which Sir Giles, in the pride of his heart, occasionally showed to Sir Walter Earle, and which never failed to exasperate the sense of bitter disappointment which the latter felt in regard to his eldest son. Adrian, however, made it his business to ascertain from Sir Giles the time when Philip was expected to arrive in London, and went to Charing Cross to meet him, animated partly by the desire to renew their old relations, partly with the idea of allaying by a short process certain anxieties which sat heavily upon him. The recognition between the two men was instantaneous. Adrian himself scarcely looked a day older than when they parted; and though Methuen was considerably more altered, his personality was of a kind which rendered him easily distinguishable.

As he stood for a few moments on the platform giving brief but incisive instructions about his baggage, which was of considerable amount, the other watched him with something of the critical satisfaction he had felt when his eyes had first fallen upon him in the dim lobby of the vicarage house at Skeffington. A good many other feelings combined to qualify this feeling, however. When one man admits the physical superiority of another, it is not so much on the ground of personal impression as from an instinctive perception of the effect he is calculated to produce on others—notably of the opposite sex.

Adrian, as a lover, acknowledged at once that Anna Trevelyan, always infatuated on the point, would think Philip handsomer than ever; and, as a son, was equally confident that Sir Walter Earle would find in his manner and bearing, indications of all those qualities the absence of which he deplored in himself. Such convictions were not of a kind to add warmth to his greetings, and he had an uneasy sense that his cordiality was half-hearted and constrained.

Philip, however, did not appear to discover any deficiency ; he looked at Adrian with just the same expression of animated pleasure that the sensitive self-consciousness of the other had always found so acceptable, and inquired after every member of the family with an affectionate interest which seemed to prove that he had brought back with him precisely the same regard which he took away.

“But we can talk as we drive to the station. Jump in, Adrian—there is not a moment to lose.”

“The station ! My dear fellow, do you suppose for a moment that you are going anywhere but home with me ? I should not dare to show my face in Arlington Street without you. Besides, what man in his senses passes through London in June, after a three years’ absence, without giving himself plenary indulgence ?”

Philip’s answer was a glance at the railway clock, and the exhibition of a sovereign before the responsive eyes of the cabman.

“If I catch my train at Waterloo this is yours ; you have barely eight minutes to

earn it." Then turning to Adrian as the cab dashed out of the station, he said, "I am more grieved than I can say to refuse your invitation, but I have timed my journey to catch the down express, and have no option in the matter."

"No option! What difference can four or five hours make to your uncle, who has managed to exist without you all these years? My father will take it as a personal offence, or if he do not, the ladies of the house certainly will. As for me, I look upon it as little short of an insult!"

"Who are the ladies of the house?" said Philip, smiling. "Your aunt, whom I have never seen, and Miss Aylmer, who would sacrifice any personal wish to ease the anxiety of another? You do not quite understand—I have been delayed more than a week in Paris, which has vexed my uncle considerably,—that I could not help, but I will not lose a single hour this side of the channel. You will explain this at home?"

"Any way, it is a sorry home-coming! I

wish you joy of your return to Methuen Place. Sir Giles will suffer no outsider's foot to cross the threshold ; and his temper, I am told, is simply unbearable."

"I am not afraid."

Adrian looked at him with his smile of gentle derision.

"Of course not ! You are a man-tamer by profession — witness your success with Lord Sainsbury ! My dear Methuen, I have not properly congratulated you. You come back crowned with the distinction of having won the good word of a great man who was never known to praise a little one in his life ! 'The thanks of the nation are due' — you see we read the papers !"

"We are too near Waterloo, Adrian, for me to undertake the defence of Lord Sainsbury — the most magnanimous and least understood of men. Come a few stations down the line with me — I have fifty things to say."

"Good ! we will take turns at cross-examination. I am only too thankful to have the disposal of a couple of hours taken off my hands."

A few minutes later saw their places secured, and Philip leaned back in the carriage with the sense of relief which comes from a danger escaped; also with a sense of fatigue arising from his unbroken journey from Paris. The latter, however, did not appear.

“Tell me now,” he said, looking across at Adrian, “all about yourselves. I remember every dog that crossed my path at Earlescourt! The four weeks I spent there were the happiest weeks in my life—I am half inclined to say it was the only happy month in my life, for I have never had a similar experience. Do things still go on there in the same way?”

“So much so that if you walked into Oliver’s room to-morrow, you would think you had only left it yesterday. Honour Aylmer and I, you also perceive, still stand in the same relation as when you went away;” he looked at his companion curiously as he spoke.

“The same? I do not quite understand. You mean that you are not yet married?”

He spoke with a self-command so perfect that it scarcely cost him an effort. During the

three arduous years he had spent in India he had succeeded, not indeed in conquering his love—Honour Aylmer would always be to him the most beloved woman on the face of God's earth—but at least in eliminating from it the selfish element. The highest happiness for her would be the highest happiness for him, though he had no share in the making of it. If at times the doubt forced itself upon his mind that there was not strength enough in Adrian Earle's nature to meet all the requirements of hers, he put it resolutely from him. Who had the power to measure another man's worth, or to decide what qualifications were necessary to a woman's satisfaction? She would meet all the duties of life with a heart and temper adequate to their perfect fulfilment, and that was simply his own business—on harder lines.

To transmute into the fine gold of willing self-renunciation every baser ingredient of his love, so as to attain wider reaches of sympathy and patience, and clearer perceptions of what wounds and heals, was not precisely a task he deliberately set himself—for such results do

not come by system or calculation—but an end naturally reached by a man who subjected every faculty and inclination to the law of duty.

Fresh from such training as this, he was perfectly able to bear without flinching Adrian's direct mention of his relations with Honour; but his next remark tried Methuen's fortitude much more severely.

"When I say the same," Adrian continued, "I mean our relations are in fact unchanged. We are very fond of each other still, as brother and sister, and we never cared for each other in any other way. Our engagement is broken off by mutual consent, and each of us has a lighter heart in consequence."

Philip had no answer at command. The reaction in his scourged and disciplined mind was so great—like that of a man hopelessly blind, opening his eyes suddenly on a sun-lighted landscape—that the keen rapture was scarcely to be distinguished from pain. His former submission had been absolute, but he was quite as capable as other men of rejoicing

that the ordeal for which he had braced his courage was not after all to be exacted.

“I am so taken by surprise,” he said at last—Adrian’s cynical look supplying the stimulus he wanted—“that I cannot decide what I ought to say on the subject; at least I—I earnestly hope that Miss Aylmer is well?”

Adrian laughed. “You could scarcely hope less! She is perfectly well, and as sweet and fair as when you saw her last—she could not be more so! But—you do not ask about Anna Trevelyan, Methuen?—that strikes me as odd.”

“Anna has continually kept me informed of her affairs, and I have even received some official communications from Mrs Sylvestre. I am at a loss to express my sense of the kindness your family have shown her—it is an obligation which can only be felt and acknowledged, but never repaid.”

“May I ask why you appropriate the obligation? I am not going on farther than Weybridge, but before we part I want to be satisfied on a certain point: is there any kind of engagement between you and Anna Tre-

velyan which would prevent any other man trying to do his best to win her?"

"There is no engagement of any kind between us."

Philip spoke almost sternly, and there was an air of solicitude in the look with which he met Adrian's animated glance, which caused the latter the most intense irritation.

"Have you any word of disparagement to utter of the girl whom you have befriended from a child, and who repays your services with the most disproportionate gratitude? Do you find some difficulty in wishing me success with the woman I love?"

"I find no difficulty, my dear Adrian, in wishing you success in any scheme which you think will make for your happiness, but I do not hesitate to say I deeply regret that you should look for it in this direction."

"You mean that—I have no chance?" hiding under a sneer his secret anxiety.

"I mean nothing of the kind. It would be hard to think of you as failing with any woman whom you wished to please. I simply mean

that—Anna Trevelyan is not worthy of you, and that you will find out that she is not worthy of you should she ever become your wife. I say this with pain and reluctance, but I should be false to our friendship if I left it unsaid."

"Understand—you must never dare to say it again!"

Adrian spoke with his face white with anger, and his voice and manner were almost menacing.

"Once is enough," answered Philip, quietly; "no threat is wanted to ensure my silence in the future." He stopped, as the train at this point slackened speed, and the other rose with passionate precipitation.

"Do you really get out here? and—do you refuse to shake hands?"

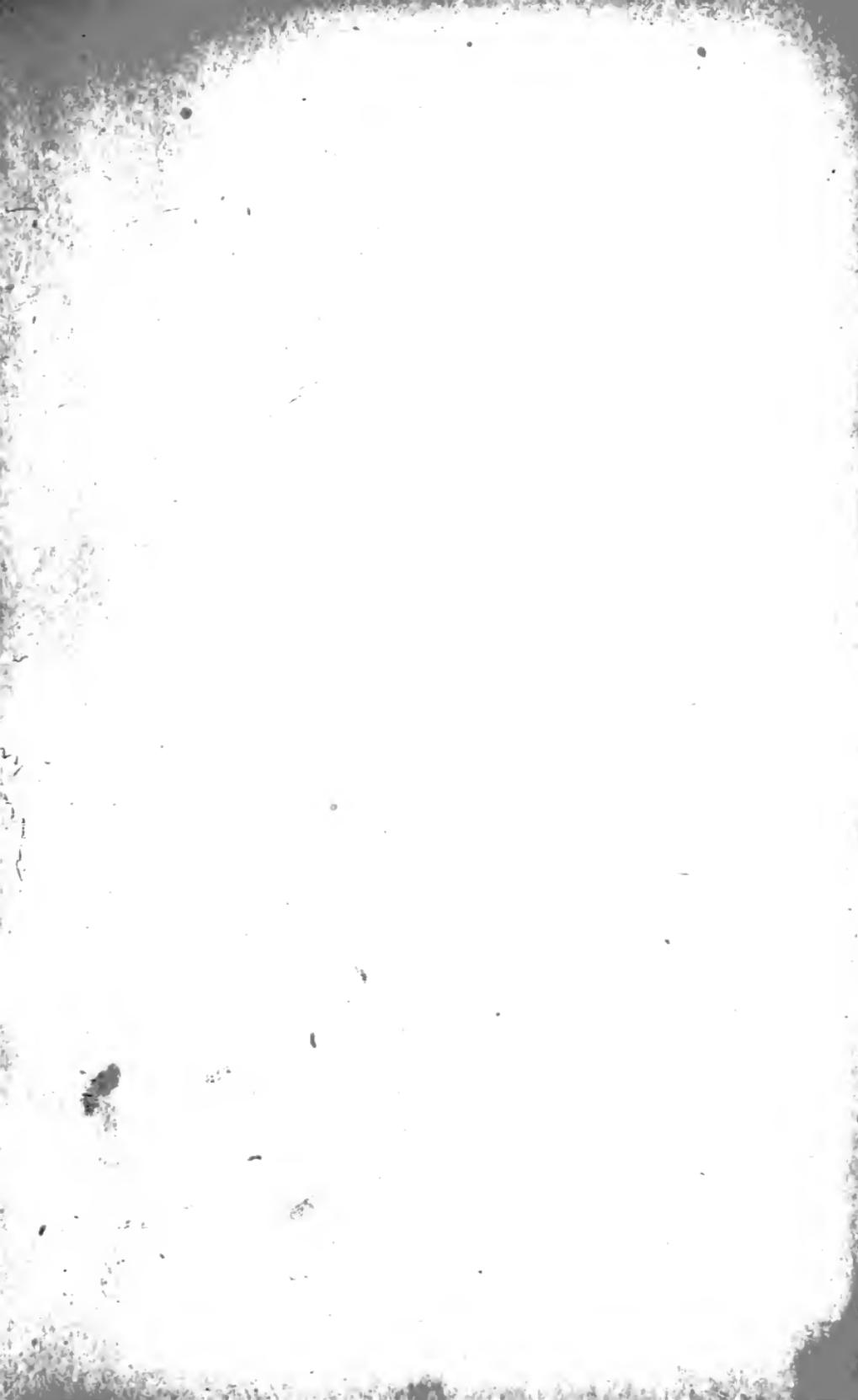
"Not if you will withdraw what you have just now said; otherwise—you and I cease to be friends!"

"On that point you can only speak for yourself. I shall never cease to be your friend, but I cannot retract words deliberately spoken."

Adrian opened the door and jumped out: an

express train cuts short controversies as well as courtesies. He was very angry, with the chivalrous anger of a knight whose lady has been traduced, and towards whom it consequently behoves to augment his own reverence and devotion. He said to himself, with the sort of feminine petulance which at times marked his conduct, that not many hours should pass before he put his fate to the touch, and his future in the hands of the girl whom Philip Methuen pronounced unworthy of him.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



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